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A STUDY OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE MEMOIRS OF IRANIAN-AMERICAN WRITER FIROOZEH DUMAS

Saman HASHEMIPOUR

Supervisor
Assist. Prof. Dr. Füsun ÇOBAN DÖŞKAYA

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University	: Dokuz Eylül University
Graduate School	: Graduate School of Social Sciences
Name and Surname	: Saman Hashemıpour
Title of Thesis	: A Study of Cultural Differences in the Memoirs of Iranian-American Writer Firoozeh Dumas
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Supervisor	: Assist Prof.Dr.Füsun ÇOBAN DÖŞKAYA

EXAMINING COMMITTE MEMBERS

Title, Name and Surname	University	Signature
Assist Prof.Dr.Füsun ÇOBAN DÖŞKAYA	DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY	.....
Assist Prof.Dr.Nuray ÖNDER	DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY	.....
Prof.Dr.Gülden ERTUĞRUL	DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY	.....

Unanimity (✓)

Majority of votes ( )

The thesis titled as "**A Study of Cultural Differences in the Memoirs of Iranian-American Writer Firoozeh Dumas**" prepared and presented by Saman Hashemıpouris accepted and approved.

Prof.Dr. Utku UTKULU
Director

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this master's thesis titled as "A Study of Cultural Differences in the Memoirs of Iranian-American Writer Firoozeh Dumas" has been written by myself without applying the help that can be contrary to academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honour.

24/10/2011

Saman HASHEMIPOUR

ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

İranlı-Amerikalı Yazar Firoozeh Dumas'nın Anılarında Kültürel Farklılıkların İncelenmesi

Saman Hashemipour

Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Programı

Kimlik arayışı modern düşünce ve edebi akımlarda, özellikle de anı yazmada, en önde gelen temalardan biridir. Anı türü herkesin anlatacak bir hikâyesi olduğunu ve herkesin hikâyesinin değerli olduğu fikrini savunur. İranlı-Amerikalı yazar Firoozeh Dumas'nın *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* (2003) ve *Laughing Without an Accent; Adventures of a Global Citizen* (2008) isimli iki anı kitabı, yazarın yeni bir ülkede karşı karşıya kaldığı yeni durumlara uyma sürecinde yaşadığı iç ve dış faktörleri ele alır. İçinde bulunduğu durumları kontrol edemediğinden Dumas anılarında ana vatanı İranı ve yeni vatanı Amerikayı karşılaştırır. Bir başka deyişle, Dumas her iki anı kitabında da bize tarihi olaylar çerçevesinde anlattığı anılarını mizah kullanarak ilginç hale getirir ve Amerikalılara İran kültürünün çevirisini yapar. Birbiri ardına aile üyelerini, karşılaştığı kültürel farklılıkları ve hem Orta Doğulu hem de Amerikalı olmanın yarattığı iç çatışmalarını sunar. Her iki anı kitabında da iki kültür arasında kimliğini ararken yazar İranlı ve Amerikalıların farklılıklarından çok benzerlikleri olduğu üzerinde durur.

Bu tez İran ve Amerika'da büyümüş ve iki ülkenin vatandaşı olmuş olan bir yazarın hayatındaki kültürel farklılıkların etkisini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma ile ayrıca Firoozeh Dumas'nın kültürlerarası anlayışı geliştirmek ve kültürel ve kuşaksal farklılıkları yeniden düşünmek için kullandığı anlatım tekniklerinin incelenmesi hedeflenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Firoozeh Dumas, Anı, İran, ABD, Kültürel Farklılıklar, Göçmenler, Kadınlar

ABSTRACT

Master's Thesis

A Study of Cultural Differences in the Memoirs of

Iranian-American Writer Firoozeh Dumas

Saman Hashemipour

Dokuz Eylül University

Graduate School of Social Sciences

American Culture and Literature Department

American Culture and Literature Program

The search for identity comprises a major theme in modern thought and literary movements, especially in the writing of memoirs. Memoir supports the idea that everybody has a story to tell and everybody's story counts. Firoozeh Dumas's two memoirs; *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* (2003) and *Laughing Without an Accent; Adventures of a Global Citizen* (2008), deal with both external and internal factors that she confronts while living in a new country with new conditions. Unable to control the situations she faces, in her memoirs Dumas compares her native country, Iran with her new country, the United States. In other words, in her memoirs, she selects certain historical events and tries to translate Iranian culture to Americans with a humorous style. She gradually introduces her family members, cultural differences and inner conflicts of being both a Middle Easterner and an American. In her search for identity between two cultures, Dumas tries to show that Iranians and Americans truly have more in common than they have differences.

This thesis intends to explore the effects cultural differences in the life of a writer with two nationalities and who grown up both in Iran and America. Furthermore, it tries to show the importance of Dumas' narrative strategies for promoting cultural understanding and rethinking cultural and generational differences.

Key Words: Firoozeh Dumas, Memoir, Iran, USA, Cultural Differences, Immigrants, Women

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ABBREVIATION LIST

USA.....United States of America

U.S.....United States of America

NIOC.....National Iranian Oil Company

DIAGRAM LIST

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INTRODUCTION

Memoir, a subclass of autobiography, is commonly defined as a literary genre “in which the emphasis is not on the author’s developing self but on the people and events that the author has known or witnessed” (Abrams, 1993: 15). Memoir is a personal narrative autobiography that examines a certain time or experience of the writer’s life. It is also about the effects of certain events on writer's personal life, feelings, learned matters and experiences as a whole.

When compared to autobiographies, memoirs are more personal, since they are about the impacts of events on author. They make us feel close to the author. They, not only contain the private life of the author, but also the public events and experiences of the time.

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, there has been an enormous growth in the writing of memoirs by Iranian women writers. The revolution acted as a catalyst for them. The shock of displacement and exile on the writers or their extended family members propelled their writing. Sufferings and uneasy life experiences of the time contributed a lot to the genre.

Most of the memoirs of the Iranian women writers are written and published not in Iran but abroad, mostly in England. Iranian women memoirists believed that their voices can be heard only through English or French, due to the problems they had faced in their countries.

Most of the Iranian women memoirists received western-style education and have received international literary prizes and became best-sellers. Satareh Farman Farmaian's *Daughter of Persia*, Nahid Rachlin's *Persian Girl*, Azar Nafisi and Firoozeh Dumas's memoirs are some of these bestseller books.

Firoozeh Jazayeri, an Iranian-American writer and a blend of Iranian and American culture, was born in 1965 in Abadan, Iran. (Her surname was changed to *Dumas*, after her marriage with a Frenchman.) At the age of seven, because of her father's job in the United States, she and her family moved to Whittier, California. After living in California for two years, they moved back to Iran and lived in Ahvaz and Tehran for another two years. Then they moved back to US again and continued living there for the rest of their lives. Firoozeh attended University of California, Berkeley and became a well-known writer in the US after she decided to write down her stories as a gift for her children.

She is a master storyteller, who shares her thoughts, her perceptions and most importantly her feelings about life and her family in an American way. *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* (2003) and *Laughing without an Accent: Adventures of an Iranian American at Home and Abroad* (2008) are collection of vignettes, in seemingly no particular order, about Firoozeh Dumas' life. Both *Laughing without an Accent* and *Funny in Farsi* are funny and sentimental memoirs of the writer which became bestsellers both in the US and in Iran.

Laughing without an Accent is Firoozeh Dumas' follow-up to her first book, *Funny in Farsi.* Both of the books serve as anecdotal memoirs of situations Dumas faced as an Iranian growing up in the United States and eventually marrying a Frenchman. *Laughing without an Accent* is a bit more serious and brings us into Firoozeh Dumas's family in recent years. Her family's trips to the US coincide with a period when most Americans did not quite know anything about Iran, and where it was. This period was followed by the Shah's downfall, the hostage crisis, and the Iranian Revolution.

Most stories are like excerpts from a life of an immigrant family confronting new situations in a comic way; but Dumas respects and loves both her Iranian and American background, and she never tries to make fun

of it. Her stories cover a vast time period; there are stories about her family when she was a six-year-old girl living in Iran as well as current stories which probably took place just before the book was published. They are in no particular order and told in honest tone. The style of the memoirs makes them incredibly easy to read and each chapter can be read in any order.

Although many of the stories in Dumas' memoirs center on Dumas' father, a former Fulbright scholar and a wise man who taught her many things, readers can witness many characteristics of Iranian lifestyle. The stories in the memoirs date back to early 1960's and take place geographically over Iran, Europe and America.

Through Firoozeh's humorous and hilarious storytelling, the readers witness what it was like to grow up as a foreigner in America. In her memoirs she gives a specific title, of one to three words, to each chapter and gives hints about the stories. Both of the memoirs are about life lessons and there is humor on every page.

Firoozeh Dumas is good for promoting cultural understanding. She chooses to be a cosmopolitan who accepts and welcomes the differences. She shows her readers that our similarities far outweigh our differences. She tries to show that we truly have more in common than we have differences. She believes that diversities make this world, beautiful, amazing, and exciting. According to her, similarities are what bind us together; and differences are what make us smile and sometimes make us laugh out loud.

Dumas takes her readers down the memory lane, shows how she came to a foreign country, got to know another culture and embraced the differences, with smile, laugh, despite a few drops of tears here and there. She does this by respecting and loving her background, and by not making fun of her ancestors. She has the habit of seeing her native country through

Americanized eyes and the US through Middle-Eastern eyes. However, she sees humor and pathos in both.

Since Dumas came of age with two very different cultures, Iranian and American, she makes comparisons all the time and shares her experiences of being an Iranian immigrant in the United States. She makes comparisons between American family life and Persian family life. For her, American families go on trips for experience and to explore new places, whereas Persian families go on trips to visit their relatives and can end up sleeping on the floor because there are so many people in the house to have good times together.

Through humor and flexibility, Firoozeh successfully adapts to life in America, in spite of certain prejudices from both sides. Her experiences in the US are similar to other immigrant stories in identity issues and to the stories of other Iranians. However, we laugh with her rather than laugh at her when we read her stories due to her sincere tone.

The striking aspect of her memoirs is Firoozeh's honesty in talking about her family and friends. Her readers can find heartwarming and hilarious things in her books. Her keen observations expose the silliness of herself and those around her with an endearing grace and genuineness, causing the reader to embrace her every word and yearn for just one more story. She is able to set a scene with few words, but provide such keen observation that she cuts right to humor of the moment. She illuminates the humor of cultures and personalities with lightheartedness and respect. She seems to find idiosyncrasies to be both precious and maddening.

This study concentrates on memoir as a theory and aims to analyze an Iranian-American woman writer’s two bestselling memoirs. Firoozeh Dumas has been chosen for analysis in this thesis because she is trying to promote cultural understanding and negotiate cultural and generational differences in

her memoirs. In addition, one can easily trace certain historical events and their reflections on individuals in Firoozeh Dumas' memoirs. Through Dumas' narrative we can witness the effects of the Iranian Revolution and the Hostage Crisis on Iranians and the Iranian-American relations.

In the first chapter of this thesis memoir as a literary genre will be studied. In this part the emphasis will be on women's memoir in general and Iranian women memoirists of the late twentieth century in particular.

In the second chapter, historical context of the Dumas' memoirs will be analyzed. In this chapter although the focus will be on the US role in the Iranian Revolution and Iran hostage crisis, background of Iranian-American relations will also be summarized and certain characteristics of both American and Iranian culture will be highlighted.

In the third chapter Iranian-American writer Firoozeh Dumas' two memoirs, namely *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* and *Laughing without an Accent: Adventures of an Iranian American at Home and Abroad* will be analyzed in detail. By concentrating on Dumas' narrative strategies, this chapter will try to show how the writer promotes cultural understanding.

CHAPTER ONE

MEMOIR

1.1. A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON MEMOIR

Biography is a story of a person's life told by someone else. Autobiography is a book about the life of a person written by that person; usually covers the writer's entire life up to the time of writing. Memoir is a focused autobiography that examines a certain time or experience of the writer's life.

Dryden defined biography as "the history of particular men's lives" in the seventeenth century (Abrams, 1993: 15). M.H. Abrams, the writer of *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, defined autobiography as "a biography written by the subject about himself or herself" (15). In another definition, autobiography is narrated as a book about the life of a person, written by that person that relies on a wide variety of documents and viewpoints or on the writer's memory. Autobiography not only provides a portrait of the person being presented, but also gives insight into the society, culture, customs and most importantly, the milieu which the person lived. Autobiography covers author's entire life until the time of writing, starts from earliest memories.

A memoir, on the other hand, is a type of autobiography and memoir and autobiography are almost interchangeable in modern parlance. Memoir is about the experiences of writer herself, not anyone else, in a brief span of time, to attract attentions to a specific circumstance, during author's childhood, education, life, family, job, society and etc. It captures specific highlights, moments or scenes of one's past, not every facts of his or her life. It is less formal, less encompassing, less obsessed with factual events and center its primary focus around a mood or attitude toward a particular section of one's life.

Personal narratives are all memoirs. Flashbacks, character analysis, symbolism, irony and other elements of storytelling are all used in memoir writing. A memoirist is usually a good observer of events, and tries to describe them as careful as possible. It tells particular events through the writer's eyes. Oxford Dictionary defines memoir as "a person's written account for incidents in his own life, the person's whom he has known, and the transactions or movements in which he has been concerned; an autobiographical record." Briefly, a memoir consists of personal experiences, but it contains public events and experiences.

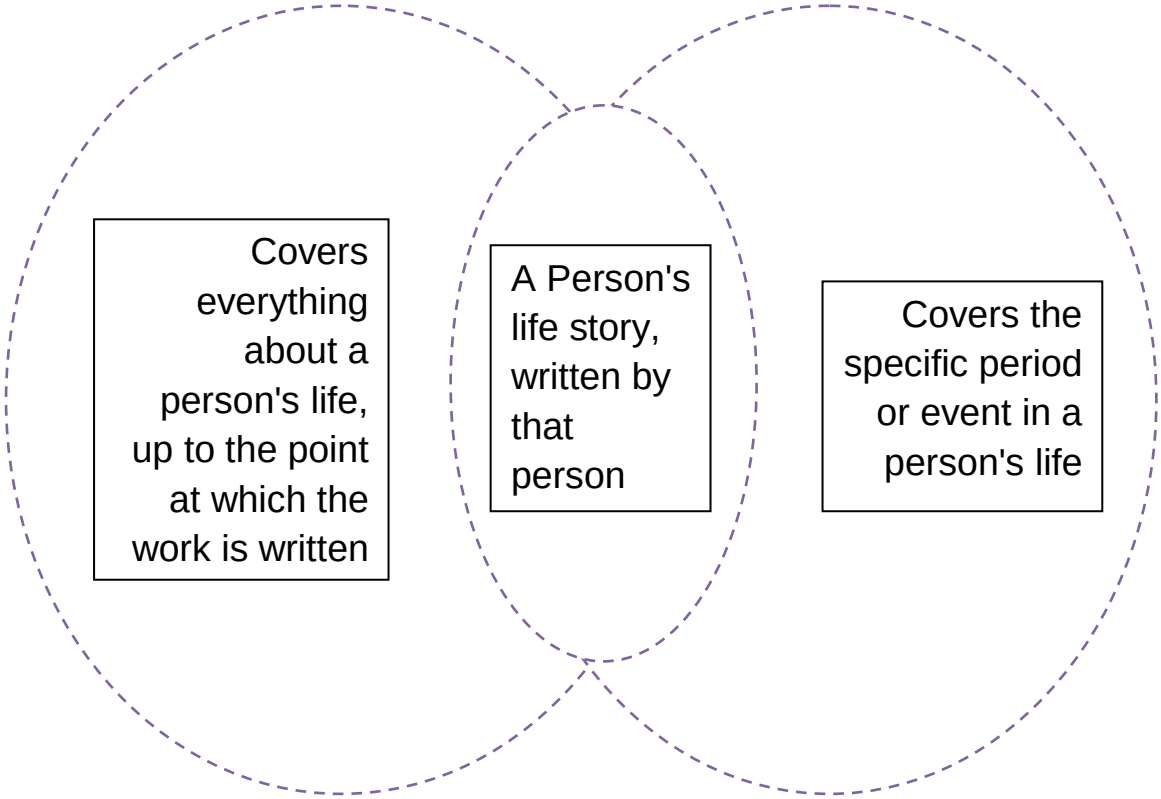
A memoir is about the writer's personal life, feelings, learned matters and experiences and their effects on him or her as a whole. It focuses on writer's feelings and emotions. It is emotional, because it consists of true life stories and the impact of events remained in memory.

Sometimes a memoir and an autobiography are used interchangeably but there are great differences between them. Since a memoir consists of selected stories from life, it is considered a type of autobiography written in a fictional way. While an autobiography focuses on the "life and times" of the writer, a memoir has a narrower, more intimate focus on his or her own memories, feelings and emotions. For that reason a memoir is considered more personal than an autobiography. Autobiography is usually about famous people, but memoir can be about anybody. An autobiography becomes a bestseller when written by a celebrity, but memoirs can be written by anybody as long as the anecdotes are witty and interesting. Autobiography is a life-story and it follows chronological timeline, whereas memoir can move back and forth through timeline. For that reason, a memoir does not have to be linear, but an autobiography is almost always linear. A memoir is less formal, and more emotional when compared to an autobiography and is about the feelings of the author about certain matters but autobiographies are actually about anecdotes that are happened in the past.

Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and *Laughing without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen* are memoirs. They are non-

chronological stories about the funny matters happened to Firoozeh Dumas. They narrate the effects of certain events on Firoozeh's personal life. Both *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* and *Laughing without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen*, are written in a formal and structured way. Timeline of story-telling is not observed and like in other memoirs, the writer does not focus on her own personality.

Diagram 1: From left to right: Biography, Autobiography and Memoir



1.1.1. IRANIAN WOMEN MEMOIRISTS OF THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

There has been a tremendous growth in memoir writing by Iranian women writers since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The books are written and published not inside Iran, but abroad also not in Persian, but in English and French. A decade after the Iranian Revolution, scholars called attention to the rarity of autobiographies and biographies written by Iranian men and women. Approximately 25 books of "khaterat", a Persian word for any autobiographical narrative, were written the following decade. "Poetry by Forough Farokhzad, or Homa Sarshar's *In the Back Alleys of Exile*, which is a collection of essays and poetry, or Zohreh Sullivan's *Exiled Memories"* were "all very important and ground breaking books", but they are not considered as memoirs according to the western literary standards (Goldin, 2004: 1).

Recent books published mostly by members of the Qagar and Pahlavi royal families, such as, "Farah Pahlavi's *An Enduring Love*, Ashraf Pahlavi's *Faces in the Mirror*, Soraya Esfandiari's *The Lonely Palace*, and Satareh Farman Farmaian's *Daughter of Persia,"* are categorized as memoirs but can be labeled as biographies again according to the western standards (Goldin, 2004: 1). The purpose of most of these books was "to rewrite history, to correct supposed misunderstandings, and to interpret the events from their writers' points of view" (Goldin, 2004: 1).

> *Undoubtedly the Iranian Revolution of 1979 is the catalyst for almost all these memoirs... The shock of displacement, of exile, even if not necessarily the writer's, but for her parents and extended family; the inability to return to one's homeland easily, safely; and awareness of the suffering of family, friends, and those left behind-all such overwhelming life-experiences propel these books of memoirs. Moreover, the nostalgia among the Iranians in exile and the westerners' curiosity about Iran reinforces the momentum. (Goldin, 2004: 1)*

The Western movement in women's memoirs has allowed Iranian writers, who are often well-read in western literature, to give importance to the ordinary details of life. Like other women memoirists, Iranian women memoirists started

talking about historical events, customs, details of everyday life and life at home. The indirect style of writing in Persian or modesty and secrecy prevented Iranian women from recording their life narratives for many years according to Farideh Goldin (1). Since writing “life narratives cannot possibly explain the author's life alone without involving other family members and friends” most of them refrained from such an activity. For example when Firoozeh Dumas told her father about writing her memoir, he responded, "Great! Just don't mention our name.”

Most of the Iranian women memoirists started their writing careers by writing the oral stories of their family members when they believed that the stories are worth writing. “For example, Gina Nahai started writing her first book *Cry of the Peacock* after a summer she spent at home, in the kitchen with her mother, grandmother and aunt, retelling old stories of life in Iran, of the events in family and neighbors' lives. Dorit Rabinyan, the author of *Persian Brides*, similarly, wrote her first novel inspired by the tales her grandmother and mother told her” (Goldin, 2004: 2).

Another characteristic of Iranian women memoir writing is that most of them are written in English for commercial considerations. Once written in English memoirs receive a wider audience and thus bring popularity of the writer. Besides, “the new generation of hybrid Iranians, barely remembering Iran, read the memoirs nostalgically, comparing them with the stories of their parents' experiences in Iran” and this also gives momentum to the memoir writing (Goldin, 2004: 2).

To minimize the west's fear of the Islamic Republic of Iran, many Iranian “writers look for metaphoric images to reveal the western side of Iran, the familiar, friendlier aspects of the country and its people as victims themselves”. Firoozeh Dumas for instance, by writing a book about Iran tries to form a bridge for non-Iranians to understand Iranian culture and reformulate Iranian image in their minds. Like many other Iranian women memoirists, Dumas attempts to preserve her Iranian culture and tries to describe Iranian customs in details. Azar Nafisi, who spent her High School years in England, and received her higher education from Oklahoma University, also brings her western readers closer to Iranian life through Western

books like Dumas. Like many other Iranian women memoirists these two writers received a western education style, and English is the language in which they feel themselves comfortable with. Mahnaz Kousha with *Voices from Iran: The changing lives of Iranian women* and Azadeh Moaveni with *Lipstick Jihad: A memoir of growing up Iranian in America and America in Iran* are other examples. They are contented with the language they use and their adopted cultures. “It is, therefore, natural for them when they write to adopt the language of the countries that have adopted them (Goldin, 2004: 2). That is why many Iranian women's contemporary memoirs have earned them international recognition and wide readership. All of these works of Iranian women memoirists have broken the barrier of language and culture for Iranian writers outside Iran. There is no doubt that they will affect Iranian culture and people in the coming years as most of the scholars argue.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1. UNITED STATES ROLE IN THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

The Iranian Revolution is important for most of the Iranian-American memoirists, especially Firoozeh Dumas. The revolution was one of the biggest turning-points in the lives of many Iranians both living inside and outside of Iran. A short look at the written memoirs and other literary pieces of the decade shows the importance of it for Iranians. Without having knowledge about the revolution it is impossible to understand the reactions of Iranians that are mirrored in their memoirs or literary works.

Between the 1953 and 1963 there was a big gap between the rich and the poor people in Iran. There were influential families, the Shah, Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and the Shia clerical establishment each of which owned great lands in the country. During the reign of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi secularism increased and the influence of Shia scholars decreased. The Shah, who had good relations with the U.S., also allied with secularists who were against Muslims with traditionalist values. He was supported by the upper and middle classes in Iran and he disregarded the view of some clerics, who were uncomfortable with the presence of Americans in Iran. The Shah signed an agreement with a western oil consortium and some clerics, including the Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini, were offended in the early 1960s when the Shah gave himself the authority to initiate legislation. When the Shah came to power in 1954, he immediately wanted to modernize Iran both socially and economically. Although landlords and some clerics were outspokenly against these reforms, he continued modernizing Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa, a religious edict, against these reforms and immediately became an anti-Shah hero in Iran. Many riots took place when Khomeini was arrested. The Shah declared martial law. In two days the rioting was crushed and many rioters were arrested. The Shah's government sent Khomeini into exile in southern Iraq, where he continued attacking

the Shah by saying that monarchy “was shameful, disgraceful and reactionary.” (Smitha, 1998a: 1)

U.S. foreign policy experts saw the Shah as “a stabilizing force in the Middle East and appreciated his acceptance of the existence of Israel” (Smitha, 1998a: 2). The Shah by getting help from the U.S. tried to modernize Iran and “laid plans for a proliferation of atomic power plants, and the new economic development included the introduction of new fertilizers and pesticides” (Smitha, 1998a: 2). Between 1963 and 1967 Iran's economy rose dramatically. Oil production boomed, however the shame of the repression in 1963 remained. The Shah continued with his attitude towards clerics who were against his modernization precautions.

In 1964, Iranian parliament passed a bill granting full diplomatic immunity to all American military personnel and their dependants in Iran because of American insistence. American soldiers could now run over the Shah in the street and no one would punish them. But if an Iranian, hit an American's dog, he would be hanged at once. The passage of the bill caused anger against the Shah regime and affected the Iranians deeply since they rejected any form of capitulation or the passage of unfair laws.

> *During the 1970s, Iran's income from petroleum rose from a few hundred million dollars to over thirty billion dollars a year. This caused mass inflation. When oil prices declined in the late 1970s, budget deficits erupted due to projections that were now too high for revenues. Iran was spending millions buying American weaponry it didn't need and its army didn't know how to use. Iran's economy was fast running down the drain. (Nosotro, 2003:1)*

There was opposition against the Shah and the way he used the secret police, the Savak, to control the country. The country was on the edge of a civil war and the opposition was lead by Ayatollah Khomeini, who lived in exile in Iraq and later in France. This was the beginning of Iranian revolution.

In 1977, Jimmy Carter became the President of the United States, and human rights became the most important issue in his foreign policy agenda. The Carter administration asked Iran to improve its human rights record by saying that it might

result in the termination of getting aid from the U.S. The Shah acted as the Carter administration wanted and he released 357 political prisoners in February, 1977. This situation encouraged the Shah's opponents.

> *In late October, 1977, many clerics joined the protests, and 87 religious and secular leaders called on the public to stay away from work. In the demonstrations that followed one demonstrator was shot to death, while the mood of the demonstrators, mainly poor people, was rage. They chanted "Death to the Shah!" They attacked liquor shops and theaters showing movies they considered lewd. And they attacked banks, believing that in attacking the banks they were attacking the rich…It was too late. Too many of those who had at least tolerated the Shah's rule had been lost. Demonstrations continued. The Shah was determined to control the streets rather than let the demonstrations burn themselves out. He was now fighting for the existence of his dynasty… There were more demonstrations in Iran and more killings by the army. The work stoppage spread. Oil workers, postal employees, bank employees, journalists, mineworkers, customs officials, transportation workers all went out on strike. So too did almost all universities and high schools… On January 16, 1979, the Shah and his family left for Egypt." (Smitha, 1998b: 1).*

On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned in triumph from France. Under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, Iran became a pure Shia theocracy. "On April 1, after a landslide victory in a national referendum in which only one choice was offered (Islamic Republic: Yes or No), Ayatollah Khomeini declared an Islamic republic with a new Constitution, reflecting his ideals of Islamic government. [He] became supreme spiritual leader (Valy-e-Faqih) of Iran" (Iran Chamber Society, 2001: 1).

As an Iranian Shia cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini had a profound impact on the Middle East. His hate of the west, especially America, heightened tensions between Muslims around the world and America. He became the political and spiritual leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and ruled the country until his death in 1989. His "call for Islamic revolution all over the Middle East led to a war between Iraq and Iran" (Nosotro, 2003: 1).

2.1.1. THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND ITS EFFECTS ON FIROOZEH DUMAS

In 1979, the Shah and his wife decide to go the U.S. to meet the new President, Jimmy Carter. At that time few Iranians were living in the U.S. in contrast to the situation of today. All of the Iranians living in the U.S. were invited to go to Washington, D.C., to welcome them. The Iranian government promised to cover all the travel expenses and Kazem, the father of Firoozeh Dumas who did not want to lose the chance of a free travel, decided to take his family to the welcoming ceremony. At their arrival to the hotel room in Washington D.C., they received a note saying;

> *Dear Brainwashed Cowards,*
> *You are nothing but puppets of the corrupt Shah. We will teach you a lesson, you will never forget. Death to the Shah. Death to you. (Funny in Farsi, 112)*

Next day when they arrived at the White House they had found a group of masked demonstrators carrying signs denouncing the Shah and his government. Then they crossed the road and attacked the Shah's supporters with stick nails driven into them. The surrounding of the White House was covered with bloody and injured Iranians. Dumas' family escaped the scene by running and jumping on a tour bus.

With the Iranian Revolution Firoozeh Dumas' father's as well as whole family's world turned upside down. Dumas' father, "who had worked for the same company his whole life, lost his job. [Her mother] decided she was now from "Torekey," and Americans decided it was time for [Iranians] to go home" (*Laughing without an Accent*, 161).

Firoozeh was fourteen when the Iranian Revolution took place. A group of Islamist students and militants took over the American Embassy in support of the Iranian Revolution and took 52 Americans for hostage for 444 days from November 4, 1979 to January 20, 1981. The event is known as the Iran Hostage Crisis and it was a diplomatic crisis between Iran and the United States. All the hatred against

Iranians during those days in the U.S. made Firoozeh to think deeply and made her extremely unhappy. She remembers those days as such;

> *Overnight, Iranians living in America became, to say the least, very unpopular. For some reason, many Americans began to think that all Iranians, despite outward appearances to the contrary, could at any given moment get angry and take prisoners. People always asked us what we thought of the hostage situation. "It's awful," we always said. This reply was generally met with surprise. We were asked our opinion on the hostages so often that I started reminding people that they weren't in our garage. (Funny in Farsi, 39)*

Then Dumas moved to Berkeley to study history of art in UC-Berkeley. However the action towards the Iranians was still the same. "In Berkeley, people were either thrilled or horrified to meet an Iranian. Reactions included "So what do you think of the fascist American CIA pigs who supported the Shah's dictatorship only to use him as a puppet in their endless thirst for power in the Middle East and other areas like Nicaragua?" (*Funny in Farsi,* 40). The Iranian Revolution had such an tremendous effect on Firoozeh that she said; "That is why, in my next life, I am applying to come back as a Swede. I assume that as a Swede, I will be a leggy blonde. Should God get things confused and send me back as a Swede trapped in the body of a Middle-Eastern woman, I'll just pretend I'm French" (*Funny in Farsi,* 41).

Every night they watched television to have good news about hostages. "For 444 nights, we waited. With each passing day, palpable hatred grew among many Americans, hatred not just of the hostage takers but of all Iranians" (*Funny in Farsi,* 117). During those days, Iranians announced themselves as Turkish, French or Russian. Nobody wanted to hire an Iranian for a work although Iranians are among the most educated and successful immigrants" and that their "work ethnic and obsession with education make [them] almost ideal citizens" in the U.S. (*Funny in Farsi,* 118). They became second-class citizens during these days.

> *It all happened so fast. It seemed like on Monday, everyone was asking us if our carpets really do fly. Then on Friday, those same people were putting "I play Cowboys and Iranians" bumper stickers on their cars…What type of person would make bumper stickers announcing hatred? Who would buy one of those bumper stickers and actually put it on his car? Isn't that the type of*

> *feeling people ideally should not have or, if they do, should at least keep private? Every time I saw one of those bumper stickers, and there were plenty, I tried to get a look at the driver. I don't remember what any of them looked like. I do remember my heart beating fast. (Laughing without an Accent, 161-2)*

Years later, in 2007, Firoozeh Dumas went to Wisconsin to meet Kathryn Koob, one of the former hostages, the author of *Guest of the Revolution*.

> *Kathryn had gone to Iran in 1979 as the director of the Iran-American society, a nonprofit organization founded in May 1964 under President Lyndon B. Johnson. The aim of the Iran-America society, as stated in its charter, was to foster among Americans and Iranians a greater knowledge of the arts, literature, science, folkways social customs…and to develop a deeper understanding of similarities and diversities of the Iranian and American ways of life. (Laughing, 217)*

Kathryn Koob, bore no malice to her Iranian captors and forgot the past. She believed in Bible's words. "'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you' (Luke 6: 27-28). She realized that in order to find peace, she would have to sacrifice something. After more contemplation, she realized that she would have to sacrifice the anger and resentment" (*Laughing*, 219). Having lived in Iran, Kathryn knows what she sees on television "does not represent the vast majority of Iranians" (*Laughing*, 219).

2.2. THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS ON IRAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

On November 4, 1979, radical Iranian students seized the U.S Embassy in Tehran, the Iranian capital, as the U.S President Jimmy Carter allowed the deposed ruler of Iran, Shah Reza Pahlavi, to enter the U.S. for medical treatment. In Iran, this was believed to be an attempt of the U.S. government to return the Shah back to power. The crisis following the hostage crisis started hostility between America and Iran which continues to this day. The publicly stated reason of the seizure of Americans in the embassy was fear of an American-backed return by the Shah. However, the main reason was the U.S. support for the Shah's government.

> *Because Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh's policies and announcements created concern over access to Iranian oil, oil prices, and possible Soviet influence in Iran, the United States and British intelligence services aided Iranian military officers in a coup to overthrow the Prime Minister. After his return to power, the Shah established a very close alliance with the United States. The U.S. supplied weapons, training, and technical knowledge that aided the Shah in modernizing his country… The Shah was opposed by… fundamentalist Islamic leaders who believed his policies and his reliance on the Americans were corrupting Iranian society. By 1978, unrest against the Shah had escalated into a violent uprising against his authority called the Iranian Revolution or the Islamic Revolution. On January 16, 1979, the Shah fled into exile for a second time, traveling to various countries before finally entering the U.S. for cancer treatments in October, 1979. After the Shah's departure, the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini returned from his own exile in France to take power over Iran. Khomeini was a leading member of the Shia Muslim clergy… Vital parts of this Islamic Revolution were propaganda and demonstrations against the United States and against President Jimmy Carter. After the Shah's entry into the U.S., the Ayatollah Khomeini called for anti-American street demonstrations. On November 4, 1979, one such demonstration, organized by Iranian student unions loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini, took place outside the walled compound housing the U.S. Embassy. Members of these Iranian student unions scaled the walls of the U.S. Embassy on November 4, 1979 …taking 52 Americans hostage. (Lee, 1998: 1)*

The hostage-takers were not members of the Iranian government or military, but their loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic government created an international crisis. The U.S. reacted immediately by "halting oil exports from Iran, expelling many Iranians living in the U.S., and freezing Iranian government assets and investments" (Lee, 1998: 1). Many Americans wanted military action to free the American hostages. However, the situation got much more complex when the Soviet Union invaded Iran's neighbor, Afghanistan, to crush an Islamic-based rebellion against that nation's Marxist government.

> *President Carter now faced a crisis with oil-rich, but hostile Iran, a new Cold War crisis with the Soviets, and a growing sense in his own country that he was increasingly showing himself to be an ineffective leader. Partly to counter the criticisms against him, as well as to free the hostages, President Carter ordered a military rescue mission code-named 'Operation Eagle Claw.' This mission was a total and complete failure resulting in the deaths of eight U.S. military personnel. On April 24, 1980, units of the rescue force landed in the Iranian desert to refuel their aircraft before heading to Tehran. A confusing series of events took place at this refueling point, including failed equipment, and desert sandstorms which reduced visibility. As a result of these problems, the rescue was called off. During the retreat, one of the helicopters collided with a transport airplane, causing an explosion which killed eight members of the rescue mission. Several of the burned American bodies were later part of*

> *grisly street demonstrations protesting the abortive U.S. "invasion" of Iran. A second rescue attempt was planned but never implemented, largely due to equipment failure. On July 27, 1980, the former Shah died. Then, in September, 1980, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Iran. These two events led the Iranian government to enter into negotiations with the U.S., with Algeria acting as a mediator. (Lee, 1998: 1)*

The Hostage Crisis ended President Carter's presidency since the one-year anniversary of the embassy takeover fell on the same day as the United States Presidential election of 1980. Carter lost that election to "Ronald Reagan, who, though never publicly criticizing Carter over the hostage crisis, promised to rebuild American power and influence in the world." (Lee, 1998: 1)

Meanwhile Iran had held a referendum. The results indicated support for Ayatollah Khomeini's rule. The negotiations between Iran and the U.S. culminated in a deal that released the hostages and the eight billion dollars worth of frozen Iranian assets. Moments after Ronald Reagan took the oath of office on January 20, 1981, the hostages were allowed to fly out of Iran after 444 days of captivity.

Iran Hostage Crisis continued to affect Iranian-U.S. relations after many years. "Iran and the U.S. still do not have official diplomatic relations with each other, and both nations hurl hostile accusations at each other over issues such as the American invasion of Iraq and Iranian nuclear research." (Lee, 1998: 1)

2.2.1. PROBLEMS OF IRANIANS AFTER THE IRAN HOSTAGE CRISIS

Some eras in the history of a country are more important than others. Social, economic, political and cultural changes occasionally converge and reshape the way a society understands itself and sets its future course. The Iran hostage crisis of 1979 is one of them.

It had an important effect on the foreign policy of United States. Luther S. Luedtke in *Making America: The Society and Culture of the Unites States* argues that "the hostage taking of Americans by the Khomeini government in Iran in 1978-79 these and other social and cultural phenomena have spurred a resurgent attention to

American character, will, and exceptionalism by neoconservatives and old liberals alike"(1987: 17). Azadeh Moaveni in *Lipstick Jihad* from another point of view, criticizes this matter by saying that;

> *When radical students took the American embassy hostage in 1979, they transformed a classic revolution into a dramatic confrontation with the United States. The hostage taking energized the uprising and added an iconoclastic dimension, a historic triumph of East over West. That is why, to this day, the Islamic Republic cultivates its stale anti-Americanism, once the life force of the revolution. (8)*

For Moaveni, "To be Iranian in the United States during the 1980s meant living perpetually in the shadow of the hostage crisis. Many Iranians dealt with this by becoming the perfect immigrants: successful, assimilated, with flawless, relaxed American English and cheerfully pro-American political sentiments" (8).

> *That my name gave me away, that people would ask in a smiley, kind way where I was from, and that I would have to say it, "Iran" and watch their faces settle into a blank, this was a permanent source of discomfort, I wasn't sure what made me feel more wretched: being embarrassed to be Iranian, or guilt at being embarrassed. Saying I was Persian helped, but no one knew what or where Persia was, exactly, and there would often be follow- up questions. The adults were marinating in politics, and had little sense of how hard it was on us, the kids. (Moaveni, 2005: 9)*
>
> …

> *The hostage crisis had forever stained our image in the American psyche, and slowly I saw how this shaped so much of what we did and strove for as immigrants. We could never take for granted that ordinary Americans…would know that the very fact of our living in the U.S. differentiated us from the type of Iranians who held U.S. diplomats at gunpoint for 444 days, Each time I told someone I was Iranian, I would search their face for a sign that they understood this….Whether we were monarchists or not, whether we took some responsibility for what happened in Iran or blamed others, the shame of the revolution placed enormous pressure to be successful, but discreet about being Iranian. As though to make up for this image's awfulness we had to ever more exceptional, achieve, more, acquire more degrees, more wealth, make more discoveries - to become indispensable. All this effort was needed to dear up our nationality's good name; being average, obviously, would not cut it Redemption became our burden. (Moaveni, 2005: 25)*

Mahnaz Kousha in *Voices from Iran: The Changing Lives of Iranian Women*; reminds those days as such;

> *A generation of American children grew up remembering the hostage crisis and praying in their classrooms for the hostages' safety. Their parents, on the other hand, started seeing Iran and other countries in the Middle East as a major threat to America and to their own lifestyle. More importantly, they saw the emergence and solidification in Iran of a government that embodied anger, hostility, and Anti-American sentiments. The more mention of Iran invokes suspicion a sense of backwards, fundamentalism, and terrorism. (2002: 3)*

Nahid Rachlin in *Persian Girls: A Memoir* remembers those days as such:

> *During this period I found that my friends who had never been particularly political suddenly became patriots and attacked Iran. Even though their anger at the hostage takers was justified, they lumped all Iranians, myself included, with them. My husband tried his best to be fair, but I was sensitive to his remarks, and, to me, everything he said sounded slanted in favor of America. When r gave readings from my work, people with no interest in fiction came to ask questions about Iran and Iranians. One magazine, which had published several of my short stories as well as a condensed version of my first novel, rejected a story because it was too sympathetic part of Iranian characters. My daughter came home from school one day looking sad; she asked me if she could change her name to Cindy. One of her classmates had asked her where she got her name, Leila. My daughter told her it was an Iranian name. Her friend made a face at the word "Iran." 1didn't know how to distill the complex political situation into terms that a seven-year-old could understand. (Rachlin, 2007: 241)*

She remembers how she had to hide her American passport in her peruse or raincoat in such a way that it wouldn't be discovered easily. (248)

More than thirty years passed since the hostage crisis. One cannot discuss this issue without considering its hidden causes and of course historical events have great impacts on its citizens.

2.3. IRAN

Iran is a country in Southern and Western Asia with a population of around 78 million. It is “cut off from its neighbors by the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf

to the North and South, and by ranges of mountains and deserts to the East and West. Yet it has always served as an important trading route" (Howard 2002: 1).

> *Not surprisingly, one of key unifying factors in Iran is religion. Iran remains an overwhelmingly Islamic country; with various religious minorities, such as the Christian Armenians, Jews and the Zoroastrians, who follow an ancient, pre-Islamic faith. Compared to Turkey, for example, Iran has comparatively few mosques or outward signs of mass worship. If Martians landed tomorrow in both countries, there might be some confusion about which state was the post-revolutionary theocracy. There are far more signs of mosque-building in solidly secular, but Sunni, Turkey than in Iran, where Shiism makes religion a more personal affair. (Howard 2002: 1).*

2.3.1. IRANIAN AMERICANS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES

The term Iranian-American is used interchangeably with Persian American since Iran was called Persia officially prior to 1935. Prior to the revolution in Iran and the cut off of diplomatic relations between the two countries, America and American universities were very popular among Iranians, and this popularity was a major force in drawing numerous Iranian students to the United States. After the Iranian Revolution and the abolition of the monarchy, the Iranian-Americans grew in number because some of the Iranians studying in the U.S. did not want to go back to Iran. This resulted in the formation of a highly educated and skilled group in the United States.

When Firoozeh Dumas and her family went to the United States in 1972, she had found out that her father's depiction of the U.S. was true: "I realized that my father's description of America had been correct. The bathrooms were clean and the people were very, very kind (*Funny*, 7). For Firoozeh Dumas it did not take long to figure out that most of the Americans she had met knew nothing about Iran. The answer of the Americans "How nice" (*Funny*, 20) when she was asked to say which country she was from meant that they did not know where Iran was. Every American seemed to have a favorite France story or Mexican, but not an Iranian story or experience to tell.

Like so many immigrants before us, we found not only what we wanted but a few things we didn't even know we were looking for: Girl Scouts, freedom of speech, affordable community colleges, guacamole, public libraries, clean bathrooms, the pursuit of happiness, and Loehman's. Of Course we also found a few things we didn't like: marshmallows, the Hilton sisters and all their friends, the lack of interest in geography, those pants that ride way too low, and tomatoes that taste like cardboard. Regardless of the influences, we swore we would live in this country but never change. We were wrong. America changed us, in ways we didn't realize. Oddly enough, we also changed America. We expanded palates of many friends to include tadiq, joojeh kabob, and desserts made with rose water. Any American who has attended a Persian wedding knows that dancing is not limited by age, weight or ability, and yes, it's okay for men to dance in ways that John Wayne wouldn't. And if there is one thing I hope we Iranians have imparted, it is the closeness of extended family, not because we all benefit emotionally from maintaining those ties. Our parents often do live with us in their twilight years, and yes, they got on our nerves. In fact, our mothers only meddle more as they get older. Some things don't change. (Laughing, 160-1)

…

Those parts of our lives that changed were not what we expected. Who knew that someday we would wear leg warmers and take their aerobics classes? We knew he wanted our family members to become educated but who knew that we'd forget some f our Persian and pick-up some Spanish? We wanted to have comfortable lives and the right to vote. Who would ever have guessed that someday we would be voting for Iranian candidates running for office in America, candidates who actually won? We wanted to pursue lives well lived. Who knew that someday we would allow ourselves to remember those lives in a whole new way, with smiles, laughter, and Beatles music? We may never put ice in our tea, but we can, when appropriate, celebrate the lives of loved ones, even if it's not the way we normally do things. (Laughing, 160)

…

During our Thanksgiving meal, my father gives thanks for living in a free country where he can vote. I always share gratitude for being able to pursue my hopes and dreams, despite being female. My relatives and I are proud to be Iranian, but we also give tremendous thanks for our lives in America, a nation where freedom reigns. But although 'land of the free,' refers to the essential freedoms that make this country the greatest democracy on earth, it could also refer to the abundance of free samples available throughout this great land. (Funny, 75)

Dumas in her memoirs argues that Iranians "as a group, are among the most educated" *(Funny,* 118*)* in the U.S. and they are obsessed with education which makes them all almost ideal citizens.

Most immigrants agree that at some point, we become permanent foreigners, belonging neither here, nor there. Many tomes have been written trying to describe this fleeing of floating between worlds but never fully landing. Artists using every known medium from words to film to Popsicle sticks, have

> *attempted to encapsulate the struggle of trying to hang on to the solid ground of our mother culture and realizing that we are merely in a pond balancing on a lily pad with a big kid about to belly-flop right in. (Laughing, 68)*

Firoozeh Dumas remembers when they were in California, they longer looked foreign. “With its large Mexican population, Whittier could have passed as their hometown. As long as they did not open their mouths, we looked as if we belonged. But just one of my mother’s signature rambling sentences without a verb,…and our cover was blown” (Funny, 37).

> *Now that my parents have lived in America for thirty years, their English has improved somewhat, but not as much as one would hope. It's not entirely their fault; English is a confusing language. When my father paid his friend's daughter the compliment of calling her homely, he meant she would be a great housewife. When he complained about horny drivers, he was referring to their tendency to honk. And my parents still don't understand why teenagers want to be cool so they can be hot. I no longer encourage my parents to learn English. I've given up. Instead I'm grateful for the wave of immigration that has brought Iranian television, newspaper, and supermarkets to America. (Funny, 12)*

According to Nahid Rachlin, another acclaimed Iranian-American women writer, for people who are not quietly American or completely Iranian, being called as “Camel Culture. Bedouins” (Rachlin, 2007: 231) is not acceptable. They confirm and respect both cultures. They “hung posters of John F. Kennedy next to posters of the dark-bearded Imam Ali, the first imam of the Shia Muslim faith” (Rachlin, 2007: 259). A sample American, may announce: " I hate about Iranians living in America is that they pick up this kind of ridiculous jargon."(Rachlin, 2007: 261) President Bush, in his state of the Union address on January 29, 2002, named Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, an "axis of evil."(Rachlin, 2007: 283)

For Azar Nafisi, a well-known Iranian-American author, being an Iranian-American is not different than Firoozeh Dumas or Nahid Rachlin’s experiences. In her book *Things I've been Silent About* she narrates her feelings as the following; “They asked me question tinged with curiosity, in a tone that was both indulgent and mocking: How many camels do your parents own? Ever been kissed? It assumed them to no end that I did not know what a hickey was or that I had once seriously

asked a girl what a kiss tasted like. But I soon became one of them-almost" (2010: 95).

In Nafisi's another book, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, she tells how everything changed for Iranian-Americans after the Iranian Revolution.

> *The fact was that America, the place I knew and had lived in for so many years, had suddenly be turned into a never-never land by the Islamic Revolution. The America of my past was fast fading in my mind, overtaken by all the clamor of new definition. That was when the myth of America started to take hold of Iran. Even those who wished its death were obsessed by it. America had become both the land of Satan and Paradise lost. A sly curiosity about America had been kindled that in time would turn the hostage-takers into its hostages.(Nafisi, 2008: 106)*
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> …
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> *When I came to U.S., I was really surprised at how politicized the view of Iran had become. It was really very frustrating at the beginning because when I lived in Iran I felt as if the government had confiscated all the images we had of ourselves and had reduced them to one image, its own image. I had hoped that when I came here, people, because they are free to read and to know, would see the multiplicity of images that exist in Iran- the contradictions, the paradoxes. But unfortunately I felt that the dominating images of Iran were those that the government had talked about. It was a very 'reductionist' mythology, the myth about Iran. First of all, one thing that bothered me was that, since the Iranian Revolution, since 1979, all of a sudden these different countries that have very different backgrounds and histories and traditions like Malaysia, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia- all of them are now reduced to one component which is religion and so they are all now called 'the Muslim world.' We never do that with, say, Europe and America. …are all Christian majority countries, but we don't call them "the Christian world. (Nafisi, 2008: 362)*

The Iranian writer Marjane Satrapi, retells how hard it was to be an Iranian in her autobiographical graphic novel entitled *Persepolis*. "At the time, Iran was the epitome of evil and to be Iranian, was a heavy burden to bear…My grandmother told me: always keep your dignity and be true to yourself!"(Satrapi, 2004: 41). She shouts at her friends saying, "I am Iranian and proud of it!" (Satrapi, 2004: 43). She remembers the days when she travelled around Europe as such; "It was enough to carry an Iranian passport; they rolled out the red carpet. We were rich before. Now as soon as they learn our nationality, they go through everything, as though we were all terrorists. They treat us as though we have the plague" (Satrapi, 2004: 49).

Sattareh Farman-Farmaian in her autobiography named *Daughter of Persia: A Woman's Journey from her Father's Harem through the Islamic Republic*, explains that as:

> *Iranians are not 'Arabs,' as western used to assume of anyone from the Middle East, any more than Turks are 'Arabs.' The original Iranians were of Aryan stock: 'Iran' means 'Land of the Aryans,' a group of various tribal peoples, of whom some settled in what is now northern Iran. However, it was from the ancient southwestern province of Fars, or Pars, that Iran received the old name by which Westerns know it: Persia. We Iranians have lived on our hospitable land bridge between East and West for much longer than our three thousand years of recorded history, and for many centuries Persian civilization, with its arts and architecture, its poetry and its highly cultivated way of life, was regarded as the greatest civilization of the Near East (Rachlin, 2007: 27).*

They started to learn what America taught them since going to the U.S. was their destiny. They were sure that luck would be with them all the time. Azadeh Moaveni in *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, tells about the people whose life had been neatly divided between the two worlds. "Westernized, educated Iranians are fully secular- they eat pork, don't pray, ignore Ramadan-and it had never occurred to the exile community to start up a mosque. Hiking groups, discos, political soirees, definitely, but a mosque would have been in bad taste (Moaveni, 2005: 23).

> *That my name gave me away that people would ask in a smiley, kind way where I was from, and that I would have to say it, 'Iran' and watch their faces settle into a blank, this was a permanent source of discomfort. I wasn't sure what made me feel more wretched: being embarrassed to be Iranian, or guilt at being embarrassed. Saying I was Persian helped, but no one knew what or where Persia was, exactly, and there would often be follow-up questions. The adults were marinating in politics, and had little sense of how hard it was on us, the kids. (Moaveni, 2005: 9)*

> *Often when Iranians encountered each other in public, they pretend not to recognize each other as fellow Iranians, speaking in English to one another in identical accents. This self-conscious public theatre was preferable to acknowledging each other in Farsi, a language that is spoken differently depending on whom one is speaking to. (Moaveni, 2005: 11)*

> *We had Iranian identities, but they formed by our memories and the Farsi-speaking parts of our soul- the part that responded, with years of accumulated references, when someone said 'love' to us in Farsi, our first language of*

> *affection. But we could not navigate the Tehran of today, or share in the collective consciousness of the Iranians who never left. (Moaveni, 2005: 86)*

> *The fusion of Farsi and English that we spoke in California was deemed vulgar and pretentious, an affection associated with Iranians who left the country for six months and forever after used lots of English words to remind everyone they had been abroad. (Moaveni, 2005: 89)*

Despite the effects of religious beliefs and their effects on ordinary people, the great variety of ethnic origins and different lifestyles make it a hopeless task to try to describe a typical day in the life of an Iranian woman, today. Many highly religious women stay at home, cover themselves carefully and make their children and husband the center of their lives. Yet others from the same traditional background go to work, leaving their children with relatives or leaving them in the office daycare. Most people's social lives revolve around their family, yet in the big cities, youngsters go to parties and cafes to socialize.

People's lives changed very little even over centuries but the big change for women occurred in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when women began to take part in public life. Contact with the West became more frequent, and the monarchy was embarrassed by serious criticisms about its attitude towards women. Girls' schools were opened, in spite of opposition from the clerical establishment. The suffragette movement was widely admired, and women began to organize themselves. The defining moment came in 1936, when Reza Shah, wanting his country to appear more modern, decreed that all women should take off the veil or be punished. His son, the last shah of Iran, granted women the vote in 1963 for similar reasons, pushing forward a series of reforms against the wishes of the clergy.

The women are more than willing to fight westernization and U.S. domination in the region, yet they contribute in the process to their own oppression. In Iran, especially, they are "second sex" (Kousha, 2002: 3) in the region. The important matter is that how women themselves see their lives and how they feel about their worlds.

For instance, Azar Nafisi in *Things I've Been Silent About*, retells her mother's story and talks about being the second sex as such; "Like many women of her time she was an in-between woman who felt that her capabilities and aspirations were stifled by her condition. When she told us stories about her grades and the bright future her teachers predicted for her, she would end up shaking her head and saying: If only I were a man!"(Nafisi, 2010: 39)

The old beliefs about mother, being between two worlds and the sentence "Heaven in under feet of mothers," did not change.

> *In a country and at a historical conjuncture where society condemned as immoral any kind of women's activity outside the house, these veiled women managed to express their opinion on the future of their country. The gathering of the more than one thousand veiled women outside the parliament on November 29, 1911, to reprimand the men for yielding to Russia's ultimatum, is a historical image never to be forgotten. (Kousha, 2002: 7)*

By the end of the century, higher education became an ideal goal for the majority of girls regardless of their class backgrounds.

> *Fathers openly appreciated their daughters more than they did their sons. A female child was symbol of good luck; for many it reinforced their ties to their mothers. Recognizing the limitations women experience in a traditional society, some fathers, especially the educated and those from middle-to higher-class backgrounds, encouraged their daughters to pursue higher education and to have their own careers. There were also fathers who, because of their class and family backgrounds, were personally untouched by the pace of change in gender roles and did not appreciate their daughters' move toward a more independent lifestyle. The daughters, however, constantly pushed to enlarge their to scope, to change with time, and to assert a certain degree of freedom. (Kousha, 2002: 110)*
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> …
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> *Blaming the mother for transferring her own troubled world view to the daughter and for shaping how daughters see the world around them is a way of clinging to the past…Women continue to see and experience their lives through their children. Those women who have their own careers and work for progress at work are seen as selfish; they are blamed for believing their own progress rather than welfare of their children and families. Being a good mother means a lifetime of sacrifice, of devotion, of labor for children, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to expect women to step back, to let the child grow away and establish a separate sense of identity. (Kousha, 2002: 74-75)*
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> …

> *Working full-time, believing in their potentials and abilities, the women expected to be taken into account, to be consulted not only about mundane, everyday life affairs but also on important decisions such as buying a car or a house, vacation trips, and long-term plans for the family…Higher education and eating power has enabled women to develop a different perspective, seeing themselves generations away from their mothers and grandmothers. While women have experienced tremendous changes during the past few decades, men seem to have hardly experienced tremendous changes during the past few decades, men seem to have hardy experienced any dramatic change in their perspectives. …Women's changing roles have given them a new outlook; men have continued to play their role as usual, albeit with some help from their working wives. This lack of respect women's opinions, in addition to a lack of legal rights to protect women's financial security, exacerbates an already-strained relationship. While those women whose mothers were respected and consulted by their fathers expected to be treated similarly, those whose mothers were entitled to minimal if any rights reckoned they would receive a different kind of treatment due to their more active role in the family and in the labor force. Experiencing a high degree of control from their husbands, some women learned to rely on themselves and to make decisions without consulting or even informing their husbands. It is significant to note that it often took women a decade or two to convince themselves that it was okay to make a decision on their own without checking with their husbands. It was okay to make decisions on their own and to have opinions that differed from those of their husbands. (Kousha, 2002: 204-5)*
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> …
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> *Many women endure an unhappy marriage for the sake of children, believing that having a father present at home is better than his absence because of the social pressure and stigma that a divorce may bring on the family…Most families encourage their daughters remain married, to hold the family together because of the shame that a divorce may bring on the family. Although granted in Islam, divorce is shunned socially. The more a woman suffers in marriage, the harder she tries to keep the family intact, the higher she is valued as a mother/wife… In a society in which public services for divorced women which children are virtually non-existent, where the larger society, friends, relatives, and neighborhood shun separated or unattached women, divorce becomes an almost impossible task if the women's families are reluctant or unable to help out or to take in the women and their children. (Kousha, 2002: 57-9)*

Most families normally have more restrictions and rules for the girls specially for their dating. Modern Iranians are so liberal about their daughter's fashion styles and are not worried about body parts being exposed. Massoume Price in *Patriarchy and Parental Control in Iran* (2006) noticed that "traditional families will be very concerned about such issues and expect their daughters to dress and act modestly, even if they do not follow veiling practices. For such families dating for their daughters might be out of question" (1).

In the same article, Price declares that;

> *[m]arriage of youth could become very complicated if the parents do not approve of the future spouse. Arranging suitable marriages are one aspect of family relations that still involve parental supervision and involvement and have emerged as constant sources of tension in the Iranian community outside the country. The matter is further complicated by the high costs of elaborate weddings and dowry, which means the couple will have to rely on parental financial support in most cases. This in turn increases their dependency on parents and increases parental control. Despite the fact, that many modern and educated Iranians have stopped interfering in their children's affairs and their choice of spouse, many still follow the traditional patterns. (1)*

Firoozeh Dumas narrates the relationship between man and woman as following: “The idea of celebrating marriage anniversaries was completely foreign to my family, since most marriages were arranged and did not come with the requisite romantic story of how we met and we went on our first date and the first time we kissed"(Laughing, 130). According to her the main problem within the marriages or expectancies from the marriages was lack of education. She explains her mother’s situation as the following;

> *The problem was that my mother, like most women of her generation, had been only briefly educated. In her era, a girl's sole purpose in life was to find a husband. Having an education ranked far below more desirable attributes such as the ability to serve tea or prepare baklava. Before her marriage, my mother, Nazireh, had dreamed of becoming a midwife. Her father, a fairly progressive man, had even refused the two earlier suitors who had come for her so that his daughter could pursue her dream. My mother planned to obtain her diploma, then go to Tabriz to learn midwifery from a teacher whom my grandfather knew. Sadly, the teacher died unexpectedly, and my mother's dreams had to be buried as well. (Funny, 5)*

Of course these are typical stories about marriage from a generation before. Some cultural habits changed in the course of time, but some of them are still the same. In the United States, in contrast to that of many other cultures, the primary responsibility of the American family member is not to advance the family as a group, either socially or economically, nor is it to bring honor to the family name. This is partly because the United States is not an aristocratic society and couples do not share their marriage plans with their parents until they decide on a wedding date.

This means that parents have little control, and generally not much influence, over whom their children is going to marry.

Americans believe that young people should fall in love and then marry. This is another significance of the importance given to an individual's happiness. In Iran's history, love is not considered as a basis for marriage; it is the stuff of poetry and literature for some people.

> *Successful marriages were marked by economic prosperity, family unity, and the raising of healthy children. Husbands and wives acted according to traditional precepts, each playing their role judiciously. In playing their roles, the patents also socialized their children into specific male and female roles. Teaching their children gender-specific attributes, the parents presumably guaranteed the eventual success of their children. However, with time came change and divergent expectations; those same values that on one point had secured the survival of a marriage seemed now to undermine it. If traditional values were guarantees against separation and divorce for those of a generation earlier, these values now guaranteed unhappiness and discontent for some women and, perhaps, for some men. (Kousha, 2002: 216)*

Being a family is so important for Iranians. Individualism is not praised in Iranian culture. Rachlin emphasizes the importance of a typical advice from parents to their children and cites it as such:

> *You're under the influence of those American movies. Their idea of individual happiness is selfish and it has hurt their sense of family life. That's why so many Americans are miserable, lonely, killing themselves with drugs and alcohols. What we have is superior; each person should think of happiness of the whole. (Rachlin, 2007: 171)*

> *Economic inflation also have exacerbated the situation, forcing parents to be more involved, to do their best to choose a man with promising economic prospects. But to the same degree that parental supervision does not guarantee a happy marriage, neither does the future husband's financial status. (Rachlin, 2007: 135)*

In her memoirs, Firoozeh Dumas continuously gives examples from the lives of women and their family's expectancies from them for finding good spouses.

> *My mother had always hoped that I would marry an Iranian doctor, someone whom she could speak to without an interpreter, a man whose parents would*

> *consider me the best thing that had ever happened to their son. She had held steadfastly to her dream, thinking that as soon as I reached my late teens, I would become the Iranian daughter whom she could relate to, the daughter who would dutifully let her parents help her select a mate.(Funny, 143)*

Massoume Price in *Patriarchy and Parental Control in Iran* (2006) argues that education is the most important issue in child raising. She declares that;

> *[t]he education of children is a major issue for most Iranians and the affluent families spent a fortune to make sure their children will have the best education possible. Both daughters and sons are expected to have the best education available. Even in the Islamic Republic itself the number of females attending universities is much higher than boys, close to 60 % for girls. Most decisions about what to study and what path to follow, will be taken by consulting with parents and other elders in the family. In many instances the young are advised on what to do and are expected to follow such recommendations sometimes against their own will. Parents, who can afford it, are expected to pay for all educational and living expenses and sometimes in grand manners according to their wealth and status. (2)*

The condition of women inside Iran is changed today. The old generation, believed it was only modern to consider women fully equal to men, independent beings with a sacred right to everything men were entitled. Old habits died hard today. Many Iranian girls educated abroad for the principle of being modern and well-bred.

In Iran, as in many developing countries, education receives the utmost attention. The last two decades have seen a vast improvement in women's literacy. The single-sex environment may ultimately have favored girls over boys. Many girls from highly religious families were allowed to go to school for the first time.

Pour-Abbas, the head of Sanjesh assessment organization announced at 2009 that in University entrance-exams, 38 percent of males and 62 percent of females were accepted. He said that these statistics are a sign of development.

A female researcher for UNICEF states girl's condition in Iran as the following; “They are in schools for six hours, then they come home and study again. There are few sports facilities, few recreational activities; they have no other choice but to study. (Howard, 2002: 85). According to Moaveni

> *a generation of … middle-class, traditional women were educated under the revolutionary republic. But inevitably, their new freedom stalled the day they graduated from university-when they walked out into an ailing economy that offered no jobs commensurate with their qualifications, back to families who expected them to hang their degree on the mantle and stay home. (Moaveni, 2005: 181)*

Azadeh Moaveni in *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, explains the situation of women in Iran as such;

> *Most of my girlfriends had no idea whether they had a 'type.' In contrast to California, no one fretted much about being unready for commitment, or the passage from dating to dating exclusively. Perhaps in time, quality of life would improve in Tehran, and along with it, quality of dating. But in the meantime, rather than worrying over arcane distinctions in relationship terminology, or the riddle wrapped in an enigma of 'Why didn't the hell back?' relationship served a far more vital purpose taking a fragile identity and anchoring it in a situation or person.…In Iran, a society in flux, every single one of those layers was also undergoing transformation. Constructing a coherent personality out of all the chaos was a formidable task. That's why my generation of Iranians was called the lost generation. And that's why for women, searching for relationships was, if not a search for self, a search to anchor a self adrift. (Moaveni, 2005:179)*

Relationships that are considered successful, that led to wedding and emigration and babies, so often required a total shrouding of a woman's real life and desires. Everyone knows this, because they watch girlfriends go through lovers, got bored of not being taken seriously, hit upon a suitable prospect, and fake their pasts and camouflage their needs and tastes in order to get married.

Becoming this mercenary prepared to meet, marry, and live under pretense of being someone you are not, takes a while. It takes the failure of the relationships where you try to be yourself, try to communicate your expansions and passions and watch it all fell apart. Moaveni wrote: "When summer rolled around, Iranian girls groomed themselves with a seriousness of purpose I had never before witnessed, even in California, a place dedicated to the worship and pursuit of external beauty. Often, a particular feature was singled out for obsessive attention like tattooed eyebrows and collagen-plumped lips. For the daughter of my waxing woman, it was the finger nailed. I suppose teenagers the world over were preoccupied with-beauty-the aesthetics of being not quite a girl, not quite a woman- but in Tehran the attention

seemed extreme. Skills of husband acquisition, which also included: knowing how to make a proper béchamel sauce, being coiffed to gleaming perfection at all times, even when stepping outside in the morning for milk, and smiling pleasantly and disguising any hint of a personality." (Moaveni, 2005, P.187)

Barbara Bridger in *Represations of the Maternal in the Work of Women Writers of the Iranian Diaspora* (2009) wrote that "of all the today Iran's casualties, among the more lethal for young people was the deterioration of platonic friendship between young men and women" (1).

> *As far back as I could remember the lives of my parents, my aunts and my uncles, had been full of friends of the opposite sex, who were simply friends, nothing more, often not even recycled former flames. Though highly traditional spheres of Iranian society had socialized along gender lines-with men and women in separate rooms, or separate parts of the room, at parties-platonic interaction and friendship had been ordinary among secular middle-class and upper-class Iranians. The revolution reserved this. It threw up obstacles everywhere to casual coexistence between the sexes: segregated restaurant lines, segregated passport offices. Separated most of the hours of the day, young people became mysteries to each other, familiar but alien. It became easier for girls to spend time with their girlfriends, guys with their guy friends. Being together involved sneaking away, into the dark corners of public parks, into the woods in the Mountains, into each other's empty houses. Maybe they would go out to dinner, but maybe they wouldn't because you can only get in the mood to do this about half the time, when you know there are eyes always watching you. Probably they would go to the home of friends and then wait for an evening his parents would be out. It wasn't always or at least exclusively, as bad as that. An imaginative couple, with some creativity and luck, could create sparkly courtship out of these circumstances. Sometimes, all the challenges infused drama and romance into a new relationship. Existing as a couple in the Iran, today, meant facing the petty, the bizarre, and the sorrowful on a regular basis. You had to trust faster than usual, and situations, rather than your own readiness, determined when you would be vulnerable. (Moaveni, 2005:190)*

2.3.2. FAMILY STRUCTURE OF IRANIANS

The second year of Firoozeh and Francois' marriage, they decided to invite Kazem and Nazireh for Christmas. The carrot jam mother had made for Francois, was broken. Kazem turns bright red and starts to struggle with his wife in front of anybody. "Why did you have to put the stupid jam in my bag?...Why couldn't you have put it in your bag…Why didn't you put in a plastic bag?...Why didn't you put it in a Ziploc?...Why didn't you put the jam in a Ziploc?"(Dumas, Laughing: 99) This is the normal behave of a family father, as the principal of family.

Father, husbands, and eventually sons who work is a fact of life, an expectation to be met, daughters who work comprise a new cultural phenomenon of the woman born in the 1920s. Work in the public sphere always has been the domain of the men. Children grew up seeing their working father coming home tired. Father are often seen as outsiders who come in with authority. Given the traditional division of labor, home is seen as the women's work place and where every man can rule and have his needs attended to. Upon seeing the tired father, all interactions within the household changed. Children start to hush up, disappearing into inner rooms so that they to not brother the father. Game come to an end slice reigns in the households, and mothers prepare to attend to the various needs of the father. Children are socialized to expect this kind of treatment toward the father; they have never seen the same kind of care and attention toward woman, even working woman. While daughters have fulltime jobs and contribute to family expense, most mothers have rarely had any experience working outside the home. They therefore show little understanding toward their daughters, their difference lifestyles, and the challenges their jobs pose. Seeing daughters as an extension of themselves and their familial lives, mothers might see their daughters' occupations as impertinent and inconsequential. This may lead to a lack of understanding of the part of mothers; they fail to see that their daughters may hold challenging jobs, that they need care, that both physical and emotional space is needed in order to resolve problems faced at work and to switch to a different mode of life, that of the family, once the daughters come home. While mothers respect that space for the men in the family,

whatever husbands or sons, daughters are denied the same treatment. (Kousha, 2002: 66)

So, gradually, the fathers and children become estranged and alienated from each other. The mother becomes an idol and protector as well as victim of the father's ultimate power. Angry with the autocratic husband and powerless in their position, some mothers, however, try to protect their children by creating a distance between children and the father. Opening up to the daughters (and sometimes to the sons) result in denigration of the fathers. In doing so, mothers have transferred their thoughts, feeling, and particular world view to their children.

Functioning as confidantes, daughters provide and emotional outlet by which the mother creates a new family of her own, separate from the father and the in-laws, in this scenario, any time the child trespasses the societal norms of prosperity, the mother can discipline the child by resorting to the authoritarian father figure and threatening the child by going to him. Mahnaz Kousha in *Ties that bind: Mothers and daughters in contemporary Iran*(1997) wrote: "Depicted as bogeyman, fathers become the all-too-powerful and oppressive male figures in the family. Mothers remain in the middle, friend of both sides; alliances are secured and children and fathers need the mother to communicate, to bridge the gap between them. Fathers too often are blamed for societal restrictions imposed on the children and for the lack of adequate economic means to establish a better standard of living. This will further inhibit the formation of the strong bond between the father and his children. As a power figure, the father is blamed for all the inadequacies and shortcomings in the family."

"Some mothers may blame all the personal, familial, and economic problems on the father. Fathers are held responsible for the social restrictions placed on the female children and the mother. However, the irony is that not all daughters in this research tended to side with the mother and accept her overall world view. Although as children they had accepted those ideas, as adults they may question validity of the father's image as an authoritarian figure." (Kousha, 2002: 68) "Woman were aware

of the fact that their fathers were often raised by strict standards during a time when showing love and affection to children was seen as a sign of weakness and ruinous to the development of children." (Kousha, 2002: 73)

"The father in a traditional family context has the first and the final word. He is ever hardly challenged by his children. This lack of challenge, however, does not signify a passive acceptance of his command over the household and the various family members. Young and all, there have always been woman who have risen to challenge their fathers' absolute rule in one way or another." (Kousha, 2002: 105)

Clara Colliver Rice in *Persian Women and their Ways*, thought:" At Islamic countries, you can't find any single man. Their religion, invites them to marriage…In an Islamic country, religion and sex are the most important matters. In every social matter, men are in the high position and women are in lower step, between being human and animal. A typical Iranian, honors for religion, sons and itself…you can find honest men between, but for many, honesty and integrity does not valid, and lying seems more subtle. In state of not being weak and lazy, are frugal, wise, cautions and hard worker…Some have rigid seem, but are kind too. City men are clever…many of them are handsome and have philanthropy with hope of their country's development. Some are magnanimous with hope of reward by God."(Colliver, 1923: 82) Marjane Satrapi criticizes the rights of men in a typical Iranian society. "If a guy kills ten women in the presence of fifteen others, no one can condemn him because in a murder case, we women, we can't even testify! He's also the one who has the right to divorce and even if he gives it to you, he nonetheless has custody of the children...! The child naturally belonged to his father!"(Satrapi, 2004: 183) Also, Under Iranian law, custody of the children automatically goes to the father, or even to the father's family, rather than to the mother. A woman has to hand over sons above the age of two, and daughters from the age of seven. From puberty onwards, the children can choose which parent they prefer to live with.

Like Firoozeh Dumas and her feelings about his father Kazem Jazayeri, Nahid Rachlin tells:"Fathers were distant figures in the lives of Iranian girls-except when it came to rules and punishment."(Rachlin, 2007: 19) In America too, the father is accepted as ruler and the children's relations with him are very formal too with fear, which, the democratic idea of equality destroys it. There is less formal respect for, and fear of, the father. But there is more affection expressed toward him. Some Americans are worried that there is too much democracy in the home. Since the early 1960s, there has been a significant decline in parental authority and children's respect for their parents. This is particularly true of teenagers. Some parents seem to have little or no control over the behavior of their teenage children, particularly after they turn 16 and get their drivers licenses.

The kind of relationship feathers develop with their children has serious implications for the mothers. Maintaining a detached attitude or being overly strict with the children has critical consequences for all the family members. A potential source of problem in marriage is the different values and aptitudes parents hold in relation to raising children. Some fathers, especially those from traditional, backgrounds, adhere to more conventional attitudes. Having suffering from societal constraints and lake of support to engage in a variety of activities, many mothers try to provide the best for their children. However, in order to do so, they may have to fight father/husband, who may have other ideal for his children.

When a husband imposes strict rules or maintains detached attitude, a wife maybe put in the position either to protect her children against their domineering father or try to establish a more balanced relationship between the children and the father. Some mothers take an active step, attempting to do away with the distance in order to bridge the gap between fathers and children. For others, the distance further attaches the child to the mother, turning the father and children into virtual strangers.

Mothers often act as emotional bridges between fathers and children. Caught between the two, they emphasize with both sides and try to act as communication channels. Realizing the significance of a strong relationship between fathers and

children, many mothers see fathers as being incapable of establishing close ties with their sons and daughters. At times, different character traits of the parents tend to complement each other. When a mother cannot say no to her child, the father often is able to oblige his children. Some mothers are too close to their children to act as the voice of authority when it comes to constructive advice.

A lot of men are not even interested in keeping the child in case of divorce. They keep telling the woman that they can have the children, but they know that no matter what they do or how much pressure they exert, the woman will stay in the marriage and are not going to file for divorce. They know that whatever they do is going to remain in the family; their misconduct is not going to leak out anywhere. That is the price of decency and self-restraint on the part of woman.

"Women are not brought up to defend their rights; instead they were brought up believing that they should hold the family together at any cost, that if there was a divorce it is their fault. It is the woman who holds the family unit together. A good woman can make it work. Such beliefs have held families together, but they certainly have not guaranteed contentment and happiness. They have not produced mutual understanding and respect. Such beliefs have allowed men to region supreme without having to question their privileges. Born to believe they are entitled to move liberty and authority, many men have enjoined a privileged position in their families regardless of their class backgrounds." (Kousha, 2002: 214)

"Given the stigma attached to divorce, many mothers have encouraged their daughters to accept suffering and to abide further. Perhaps they did this because they knew there was no return for their daughters; because they had gone through the same path many times over-knowing only too well that there was no option for them, but to persevere and that, they would survive one way or another." (Kousha, 2002: 215)

2.3.3. IRANIANS AND THEIR CUSTOMS

Some Iranians "identified the source of Iran's problems as stemming from its relationship with Western powers. They included influential phrase "gharbzadeghi" variously translated as Westoxification, Westomania or struck by the west. Azar Nafisi wrote in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* that during her first years abroad when she was in school in England and Switzerland, and later, when she lived in America, she attempted "shape other places according to" her "concept of Iran."(Nafisi, 2008: 82) She tried to Personalize the landscape and even transferred for a term to small college in New Mexico, mainly because it reminded her of home. Nafisi in an interview with Random House Reader's Circle says: "There are so many apologists for this sort of thought who say that people over there…natives…they deserve what they are getting. This is their culture and the west should not criticize it because, you know, we tent it. They do not differentiate between the state and the people, and take the state's view of religion and tradition and history and culture as the only one." (Nafisi, 2008: 368)

Farman Farmaian also wrote in *daughter of Persia* that:"Many people felt that we were not only trying to catch up with the west, but to become the west, while an entire old generation of parents, even among Persians of my class, was shocked and outraged at what these Western ways were doing to their children, culture, and what Iranians considered moral behavior."(Farman Farmaian, 2006: 263) Azadeh Moaveni in *Lipstick Jihad* wrote:"As though to make up for this image's awfulness we had to be ever more exceptional, achieve more, acquire more degrees, more wealth, make more discoveries- to become indispensable. All this effort was needed to clear up our nationality's good name; being average, obviously, would not cut it. Redemption became our burden."(Moaveni, 2005: 25) "I had stepped into this Iran partly as an Iranian, reading the grinds of coffee cups, burning 'esfand' toward away the evil eye, but also as an American, constricted by the absence of horizons (of so many sorts), genuinely shocked by the grim ordinariness of violence and lies."(Moaveni, 2005: 88)

American fantasy has shocked some Iranians at the first look, that place was so different from their homeland. Sattareh farman Farmaian in *Daughter of Persia*, describes how she shocked by new country, United States. "Vast neighborhoods of wide streets, skinny palm trees, and low, white shops and bungalows. I saw the houses standing isolated and without walls, and wondered whether the inhabitants could not afford to build any. Yet every home looked prosperous, and after a while I began to realize in astonishment that Americans built homes in this exposed, innocent, and trusting fashion because they wanted to."(Farman Farmaian, 2006: 159)

But Iranians kept their cultural values in the United States during decades."If there was one over-arching value to Iranian culture…it was respect for one's elders."(Moaveni, 2005: 170) They use "Inshallah, one day in the future…As soon as a baby comes into the world an angel writes its destiny on the baby's forehead."(Rachlin, 2007: 25) Bringing gifts and presents when returning back, "they are specialty of Iran that is often given when someone is going abroad."(Satrapi, 2004: 9) Visiting relatives is another specific that is not forgotten by them. "No matter what time of the day you go into the home of an Iranian, you will be offered food. It can be one hour after you have consumed a wildebeest, but the host will still ask you. You can be bloated, lying on the floor, clutching your extended gut, top button of your pants burst open, but the host will still offer you food or drink for your particular condition."(Dumas, Laughing: 26)

If there's one thing that separates Middle Easterners from Westerners, it's the way we mourn. "We can out-mourn any-one. For many in the Middle-East, a highly emotional funeral is proof that the deceased is missed…In Iran, there is something called tabaki, which is the act of attending funeral and other religious ceremonies such as rozeh-khooni to cry and encourage others to follow suit. It is considered a good deed to help others release their pain. One can also hire professional mourners, who recite prayers from the Koran and encourage everyone to cry. In tabaki, a fascinating documentary about the world of professional mourners….Living in an

Islamic theocracy, there is a market for such services, sort of like people in America obtaining real-estate license to take advantage of hot real-estate markets. In Iranian culture, we mourn the day a loved one passes, the day he is buried, three days after, seven days after, forty days after, and at the one year mark. After that, we mourn every year the day of the passing. People often visit the grave site of a loved one at the end of every week."(Dumas, Laughing: 155)

Azar Nafisi explains this tradition in a sentence. "On the Friday after my grandfather's death, a crowd gathered in our living room to pay tribute."(Nafisi, 2010: 63) They cooperate in every ceremony of each other. Marjane Satrapi in *Persepolis2* remembers how family members congratulated her return to Iran."I had been in Tehran for ten days. Despite my reluctance, in the end my entire family came to see me…Even though I knew that they were coming to see me out of friendship and kindness, I'd quickly had enough of receiving them every day. But there was nothing to be done, the visits continued."(Satrapi, 2004: 104)

Farman Farmaian describes this event in a comic way. "It was like any other Iranian woman's social life, meaning that it took place mostly at the family lunches, dinners, visits, birthdays, engagement parties, weddings, funerals, and thousand other occasions on which Persians reassure themselves that they are still embraced by the all-encompassing walls of the family."(Farman Farmaian, 2006: 235)

Iranians kept whole their historically events and ceremonies. Nowruz the traditional Iranian/Persian New year holiday, for instance, marking the first day of spring and the beginning of the Persian calendar. This celebration predates Islam and begins on the day of the astronomical vernal equinox on or before/after March 21st. In Iran, the biggest holiday in Nowruz, New Year's Day. Since it is secular holiday, Nowruz, is celebrated by the entire country, as Thanksgiving is in the United States. It was begins on the first day of spring at the exact moment of the equinox. "Every Iranian knows the exact moment the jubilation begins."(Dumas, Funny: 105)

Nowruz antecedes by weeks of preparation. Everybody tries to clean his house, buy new clothes and traditional pastries. A ceremonial setting called a haft-seen, which consists of seven symbol beginning with the sound "s," also other elements of luck, such as goldfish in a bowl, mirror and colored eggs. "These objects represent health, renewal, prosperity, fertility, and the usual universal hopes shared by people at any New Year's celebration. Unlike the traditional American New Year's wishes, however, the Persian New Year holds no symbol of hope representing "losing ten pounds" or "getting in shape." (Funny, 2003: 106)

For Nowruz, most business close and the streets are deserted. For twelve days after the equinox, people visit relatives and friends, always starting with the eldest. Once all the eldest have been visited, they in turn visit younger members of the family. At every house, a trade of homemade sweets is offered along with wishes for the New Year. Nowruz holidays, "originating in Zoroastrian times, is the biggest secular holiday in Iran. Starting on March twenty-first and lasting for two weeks, it marks the beginning of spring and celebrates the renewal of life. Haft seen, seven items, each starting with the letter S, representing rebirth, health, happiness, prosperity, joy, patience, and beauty.

On the thirteen day of the holiday, 'getting rid of thirteen,'" Iranians go "on a picnic in a park, as spending the day close to nature …supposed to be good luck."(Rachlin, 2007, P.93) "Picnics and visits shrines are popular, especially on the thirteenth day of Persian New Year, or Sizdeh-Bedar, when families load up with ports, pans and cooler boxes and head out into the countryside. They often drive off with a little pot of sprouts of wheat or lentils, known as sabzeh, or greenery, balanced precariously on the car hood. The sabzeh has been growing for several weeks, on each family's haft-seen or 'seven s' table, a display of seven goodies beginning with the letter 's' and other elements symbolizing rebirth and renewal. The little pot is then taken to the picnic spot and thrown into a river or creek. Each person makes a wish, hoping for good luck in the New Year. Single girls who want to find a husband tie a knot in the seeding before they throw them into the water….It is considered bad luck to stay indoors on that day, so that city-dwellers with no

opportunity to get out of town could be seen picnicking in parks and even in the middle of the intersections."(Howard, 2002: 185)

CHAPTER THREE

FIROOZEH DUMAS AND HER MEMOIRS

3.1. *Funny in Farsi* and *Laughing without an Accent*: SELF STORIES OF DUMAS

Like most adventure stories, both of Firoozeh Dumas's memoirs begin simply. They were originally written as a gift to the writer's children and they narrate Firoozeh's experiences in the U.S. as an Iranian woman. *Funny In Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up in America* and *Laughing without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen*, are adventures of the writer about the difficulties of transition from Eastern culture of Iran into the American western society. Dumas shows respect to the traditional values while becoming a part of a new and highly modern society. Without losing her identity, Firoozeh Dumas shows her readers the challenges a person faces in an adopted country and in a new culture.

In these brief and often laugh-out-loud memoirs, which are declaring cultural differences, Firoozeh Dumas tells about her life growing up in two cultures. She shares with her readers, the difficulties of arriving in the United States in 1972 as a seven year-old schoolgirl, making a new home in a place that seems both a wonderland of Mickey Mouse and Barbie dolls and a baffling maze of strange customs and a new language, the culture shock of moving from a small town to Tehran, and the equally disturbing shocks of living first in Southern California and then being a college student in Berkeley. Don Kazak in an essay titled *Funny again, in English* said that Firoozeh truly had an Alice-in-Wonderland experience in the U.S.

In her memoirs Dumas speaks of the kindness of many new neighbors to an immigrant family from a place which most of them knew nothing about. Both of the books, cover a vast time period; the youngest story is from when she was a six-year-old girl living in Iran, and the oldest one from events which probably took place

months before the book was published. The stories are in no particular order; so, events take place in each other.

The difficulties of living in a new country, like her parents' insist with the language of their adoptive country, seem painful for an American audience. Her petroleum engineer father appears as the strongest character in the memoirs. He never loses his sense of wonder at the surprises that America has to offer for a traveler from Middle East. His surprising inability to speak good English, despite being a student in United states for many years, makes Firoozeh, wonder if he had lived in some other United States that they had not yet seen. Firoozeh uses her father as an example to show that environmental changes are not enough to change personal characteristics, which is the main thesis of her memoirs.

Both of the memoirs, take Firoozeh through high school and college years to her marriage with a young French immigrant, with whom she makes a new home in another state (San Francisco) without losing sight of her family. The memoirs are related to each other. Each one of them talk about her parents' optimism and love of U.S., as well as the reactions and feelings of her brothers and relatives. In some parts of the books one may even think that they are about Dumas's family much more than Firoozeh herself. They are a group of essays about the adventures of a family who was trying to start a new life in a new country.

In all of her lectures in conferences, schools, universities, or churches, Firoozeh Dumas wants to remind her audience that our commonalities far outweigh our differences. She argues that cultural differences, make great separations but according to her, there is more that binds us together as human beings than divides us as members of different cultural societies. For her "we all have a story to tell" and each one of them has a value.

Funny in Farsi for Dumas is about being a foreigner. According to Anna Flanagan's observations in her article named "*Funny in English too*"

> *She was Julie, the American at school. Then at home, was Firoozeh, the Iranian with a house that smelled different from everyone else's house. She dropped Julie during her college days at the University of California at Berkeley, although she continued to feel like an outsider, but because of her socially conservative rather than Iranian background.*

Dumas illustrates that while she is from a different culture, the differences are as the same as the similarities. She narrates those differences in a folksy, conversational style with unique mark on the themes of family, community, and tradition. She shows how a Persian woman, married to a French man raises her children. She mixes her admired Iranian customs with her Western ideals and shows how our differences can unite us.

In her memoirs Firoozeh Dumas, by using humor, translates Iranian culture to Americans and tries to combine the words "Iran" and "humor" in the minds of her readers. About her humorous style, in an interview with Khaled Hosseini, she once said the following; t "If people compliment you on your feet, it doesn't make you think you are going to grow up to be a foot model. I consider myself an accidental humorist. The last thing on my mind was being funny."

> *Iranians have immigrated to the United States in two waves. In the first wave, from the mid-1960s until the outbreak of the revolution in 1978-79, college students came to the U.S. to study. They often studied technical fields such as engineering, and were encouraged to return to Iran to meet the needs of the rapidly industrializing Iranian economy after the oil boom in the 1970s. (Mearo, 2009:1)*

The largest concentration of Iranian Americans by far is in California, where over half of Iranian Americans live. Some people even refer to parts of Los Angeles where these immigrants live as "Irangeles" (Kelley, 1994). Other significant Iranian American populations can be found in San Francisco, New York, Washington D.C., Maryland, and Houston. Iranian American communities symbolize how immigrants try to create a space for themselves in a new country.

In her memoirs she shows marriage, religion, political life, food, family and the cultural conundrums of immigrant life. By means of literature, she brings people

together and teaches them how to view other cultures. She summarizes her ideas on the issue by saying the following in one of her interviews.

> *Most people want to be reminded of our shared humanity rather than our differences…[these books are] showing another side of the Iranian people to the world. Most Westerners think Middle Easterners just discuss politics and religion all day. We're actually quite fun.*

For Firoozeh Dumas Iranian culture is a “lively culture full of humor, depth, hospitality, music, raucous weddings and food.”

In another interview with Michael M. Yell, she says: “the human experience is quite universal….Unfortunately, many Americans think that Iranians are potential terrorists who hate America.. [but] what they see on the evening news does not represent an entire country.” She accepts the fact that “Iranians in Iran disagree with American politics, but [they] do not dislike the American people. For Iranians, there is a clear distinction between American foreign policy and the American people." In an interview with Khaled Hosseini she makes it clear that “when [American] hear the words Middle East, and they all say war or terrorism.” However according to Dumas this is as inappropriate as saying Ku Klux Klan when hearing the word America.

Firoozeh Dumas reminds Khaled Hosseini her Iranian-American nationality: "There are parts of me that are Iranian and parts of me that are American." She wants her children "to be citizens of the world." She says to Shabnam Rezaei:" I wanted my children to learn from my life never to be afraid of people who are different from them….I wanted my children to know my stories, just like I know my father’s life through his endless oral stories."

She talks about her love of reading and writing in her essay, *A Spoonful of Humor Gets the Pages Turning*.

> *As a kid, I was as an eager reader, one of those people who always checked out the maximum number of books allowed at the public library. In fact, books saved my life… The only constant in my life was the love of reading. I often*

felt that I had more in common with the characters in books than anyone I actually knew.

3.2. FAMILY MEMBERS: CHARACTERS

The main characters in the memoirs are as follows; Firoozeh Dumas's father Kazem. He is a funny man, who lost his job during the Iranian revolution; Firoozeh's mother, Nazireh; She is an elegant lady who never cared to learn English; Firoozeh's uncle, Nematollah. He is a lover of American fast food and he tries to lose weight, each time after a big meal; and Firoozeh herself, who as a girl changed her name to Julie, and who came across a new cultural shock when she met and married an another immigrant Frenchman.

In 1972 her parents and fourteen year old brother *Farshid*, moved from Abadan, Iran to Whittier, California. They had no previous knowledge of United States, but her father's memories of university years. *Farid*, the older of her two brothers, was already in the U.S. attending high school. After a two-year stay, she and her family moved back to Iran and lived in Ahvaz and Tehran. Two years later, they moved back to Whittier, and then to Newport Beach, California. There, she changed her name to *Julie* to make it easier for Americans to pronounce.

At the age of seventeen, Firoozeh's father Kazem began working for NIOC, the National Iranian Oil Company, as a student employee. He worked his way up the corporate and became a senior project manager. His lifetime of experience with oil refineries brought them to America. But before that he had won a scholarship and studied in the U.S. He lived in Texas and California during his graduation. Kazem talks about America "with the eloquence and wonder normally reserved for a first love"(*Funny,* 3). To him America was the promised land of frontiers where "anyone, no matter how humble his background, could become an important person" (Funny: 3-4). Back in Iran, in Ahwaz, Kazem had difficult childhood, since his parents died at an early age and he and his siblings had to protect each other. That's why when they migrated to the U.S. they continued supporting each other in good and bad

times. Firoozeh argues that if someone asks Kazem about his "proudest moment, he would probably mention the day his nephew *Muhammad* finally bought a house in America or the day his great nephew *Mahan*, graduated from law school" (Funny, 13).

Kazem is proud of being the first member of his family to study in the U.S., by winning a Fulbright scholarship. Also he is the first one in the family to buy a house in the U.S. For that reason, he announces himself as "the Christopher Columbus of the family" (*Funny*, 68). Nearly all of their siblings live nearby to their house in southern California and "the clan" has been there ever since.

After thirty-three years of working with the same company, Kazem never doubted the security of his future. But after the Iranian revolution, his experience was no longer needed. Then he found an engineering position with an American company, but the Hostage Crisis in Tehran, made him laid off. At the age of fifty-eight, he found himself unemployed and with no prospects.

Kazem realized that his monthly pension from thirty-three years of employment with the NIOC, would buy him only a few restaurant meals in America. So he decided to use them in social benefit programs.

> *Every year he withdraws the pension and donates it to the needy. He has paid for surgeries, numerous medical treatments, eyeglasses, and medicine. About ten years ago, he met three children who had lost both parents and were living with their elderly grandparents. Every year, he supplies them with clothes, books and toys…he bought desperately needed car parts for a man who makes his living as a driver and who without his car would have had no job. (Funny: 186)*

Kazem has a great effect both on Firoozeh herself and her memoir writing. She always resided with what her father said to her. In one of her interviews she said to Khaled Hosseini that her father was the absolute funniest person she had ever known.

Farid, her oldest brother, like most of Iranian youths had always dreamed of attending foreign colleges. Nazireh, as a mother was never comfortable with the idea of sending her children to study abroad.

The other brother of Firoozeh, Farshid became a businessman in the U.S. and as she points out has “enough mileage to travel to the moon and back in business class” (Funny, 167). He makes free trips to faraway lands with friends and family members and has no problem of spending money. He pays someone to "wash his car", "hem his pants", "clean his house" and also "pays extra to have his laundry picked up and dropped off at his doorstep" (*Funny*, 167). Farshid started school at the age of five, where public schools start at six. "When Farshid was in kindergarten back in Abadan, he was, according to all reports, an extremely popular and charismatic person”(*Funny*, 43). When it was time for Farshid to attend school, parents enrolled him in the school for employees of the National Iranian Oil Company. He attended a prestigious school that assigned so much homework that nobody “saw him anymore” (*Funny*, 17). Maybe that is the reason of his success today. He still consulted before all decisions made in the family. He has "steered endless numbers of cousins and second cousins through decision ranging from which type of car to buy to which courses to take in college to which nasal decongestant works best” (*Funny*, 43).

For Firoozeh, United States is the land of Barbies. She takes pride in her Iranian heritage and emphasizes the significance of family and love in her life. Since she had spent some years of her childhood in Iran, she has close relations with her relatives. Iranian families are normally extended families in which grandparents, uncles and aunts are involved. That is the reason why they are both emotionally and financially detached to each other.

Only one word in English describes the word "cousin" where as in Persian, there are eight different words to describe the exact relationship. Before marriage Firoozeh Dumas reminded her husband that she came with a tribe to refer to the close relations of Iranians between relatives. Her husband, Francois’ answer was that

he loves tribes. In her memoirs Dumas commends on the issue as such; “I realized that he didn't marry me despite my tribe, he married me because of them” (*Funny,* 103).

Firoozeh makes it clear in her memoirs that education is very important for all her family members and they always give support to each other in any occasion related to education. In *Funny in Farsi* she depicts graduation ceremony as the following: "As boring as graduation ceremonies are, my relatives attend everyone, rejoining in the academic accomplishments of the children and grandchildren. Nobody understands the graduation speeches, but everyone goes to clap and cheer” (102). Since almost every child in Firoozeh’s family had academic education, a diploma is “a record that brings tears of pride and joy to the eyes of the older generation, a record that we hope to continue" (102).

In her memoirs Firoozeh remembers the affectionate family relations back in Iran also. For example she mentions her aunt Sedigeh who had no daughters. Aunt Sedigeh was Kazem's beloved sister who raised Kazem after the death of their mother. She is "the closest thing she had to a mother-in-law” (*Funny,* 37).

> *[She was] always warm and affectionate, she showered me with compliments that stayed with me long after our visits had ended. She often told me that I was smart and patient and that she wished that I were her daughter. She never criticized me, but loved me as only a father's sister could. To me the word ammeh still conjures up feelings of being enveloped with love. (Funny, 97)*

Although she was "the smartest one of all” brothers and sisters Sedigeh was not allowed to continue her education after the sixth grade and was forced to marry shortly after she left school. All of her brothers became engineers and doctors. According to Kazem this is not fair and if she “had been able to pursue her education, she would have become the best doctor of them all, for not only was she smart, she was resourceful as well”(*Funny,* 100).

Uncle Abdullah, Firoozeh's *shohar-ammeh*, was a translator and “a man of books, a learned man who enjoys learning for its own sake” (Funny, 97). His linguistic knowledge is what she adores:

> *If I asked him the meaning of a word in Persian, he would explain its Arabic etymology, giving endless examples of words sharing the same root. He would then discuss the word's evolution into its present form and throw in a few quotes from the Koran for good measure. By the time my uncle finished explaining, I had usually forgotten my question. Nonetheless, I was entirely fascinated by his passion for words and by how much he knew. (Funny, 98)*

Aunt Sedigeh and Uncle Abdullah had earned a living by translating official documents and serving as notary publics. Uncle Abdullah also officiated at marriage ceremonies, a job that allowed him to utilize his in-depth knowledge of Arabic and the Quran. This job meant that Aunt Sedigeh had the scoop on every independent marriage for miles around.

Ameh Sedigeh's sons: *Mohammad, Mahmoud, Mehdi and Mehrdad* are all married and they all have children, who Kazem considers to be his own. Kazem loves recounting endless stories about intelligence, wit and charm to them and his nephews adore him. All of Sedigeh’s sons are in good positions right now and they are very detached to their uncle Kazem.

Uncle Nematollah, one of the main characters of both memoirs, is Kazem's younger brother who likes American food so much. He was their guest for seasons, not nights. Firoozeh defines him as the following; “Every family has a dared evil. In my father's family, the honor goes to Uncle Nematollah, whose daring feat consists of selection his own wives, three times” (Funny, 24). Firoozeh and her family liked him so much that when he returned to Iran, they all thought that “the house was going to seem empty without him” (*Funny*, 30).

Francois, Firoozeh's husband is a special character with great differences when compared to Firooezeh. He is a computer engineer with a strange catholic family. His grandfather, *Savas*, was buried in Muslim ceremony and his Belgian grandmother, *Octavie*, reburied him in a Catholic ceremony again. When *Francois*

was a child, his teacher “called his parents after a week to inform them that their son was exhibiting inappropriate behavior” (Funny, 58) and needed to see a psychologist immediately. But the underlying reason of his attitude was that he had lived for many years in Africa, and he was unable to keep his clothes on at school.

Before meeting Firoozeh, Francois had a French girl-friend, an intelligent and capable person, who was Jewish. Her religion was a problem for Francois’ family. They had the same problem with Firoozeh's religion too and she never had good relation with her husband's mother. But Firoozeh's parents had different vision about Francois. The first time they met him, they insisted on taking him to the nicest Persian restaurant in Los Angeles. Francois ate everything with gusto. Firoozeh recollects that day as such “Francois ate and ate and ate”… "My father asked me in Persian, whether he always ate like this?” “My mother said, in Farsi, that she hoped he wasn’t going to get sick.” “Meanwhile *Francois* kept eating” (*Funny*, 142). This was their first meeting and its memory still makes them laugh.

Firoozeh's oldest paternal uncle, *Muhammad* is the first doctor of the family. As a young doctor, he supported his younger siblings, enabling them to continue their education. He had a successful practice in Ahwaz and enjoyed a life of luxury up until the Iranian Revolution. He and his family fled to America in 1980. Muhammad's Iranian medical license did not allow him to practice in America, so he had to take both English and medical courses and pass the necessary exams. At fifty-eight, an age when most doctors are thinking of retirement, he had to spend a year as an intern, being the oldest one in the hospital.

After completing his education, Muhammad set up a practice in Southern California, joining the ranks of other hardworking immigrants pursuing the American dream. Eventually, he managed to create a lifestyle somewhat like the one he left in Iran. He even bought a Mercedes, which, unlike his Mercedes in Iran, he has to drive himself. Kazem says that his brother made the family proud twice, once as a young man when he became a doctor and once as not a young man when he

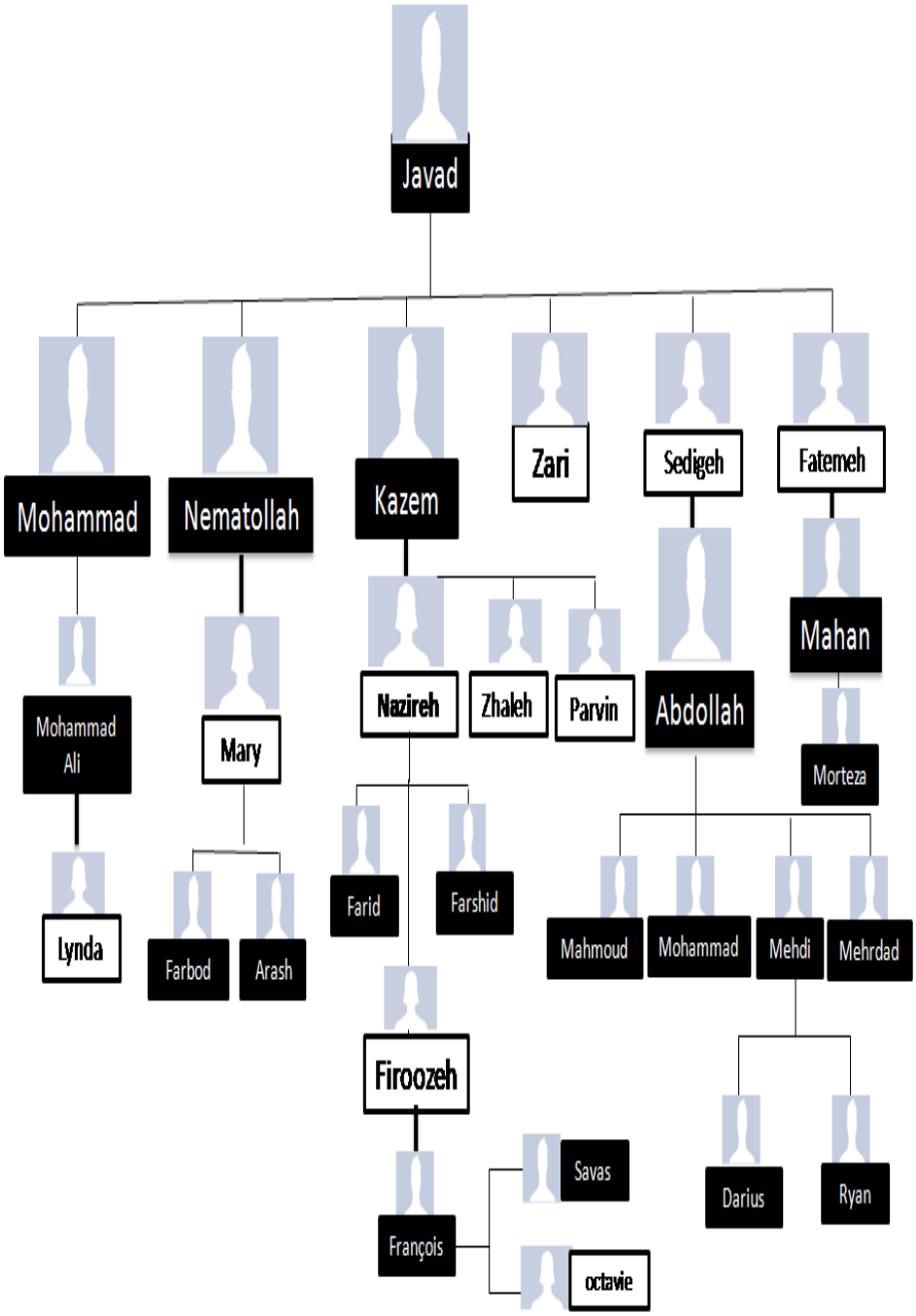
became a doctor the second time. Firoozeh says: “Uncle Muhammad is our family's symbol of perserverance” (Funny, 102).

There is a great chain between family members, uncles, aunts and cousins. After the Iranian Revolution, Kazem unable to find a job in Southern California, had stayed with Mehdi's family while working in Northern California. Also Mehdi's oldest son, *Darius* and his younger brother, *Ryan*, had moved into one room so that Kazem could have his own room. Twenty years later, Firoozeh and Francois cleared out a room in their house so *Darius* could stay with them while working as an intern at a nearby computer firm. They are so united “knowing that the thread of kindness and generosity” in their family “has no beginning and no end” (Funny, 100).

Ali and *Zahra* also were their family servants and gardeners in Abadan, Iran. Unlike America, in Iran even middle-class families employ full-time help. They were from a small village in northern Iran. *Kazem* and *Nazireh* found them another family to live with, when they decided to go to U.S. On their departure date no one cried harder than *Ali* and *Zahra* did.

All these characters are combined in two fantastic novels of *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* and *Laughing Without an Accent*, to make good memories of Firoozeh Dumas's memoirs. They are the self story collections, consisted of many interesting stories from these characters and the effects of them on Firoozeh Dumas, herself.

Diagram 2: Family Tree of Firoozeh Dumas and her Family



3.2.1. IRANIAN FIROOZEH

When Firoozeh was a child, she could not accept the idea of moving their house in Abadan, to Tehran. She loved her life in Abadan so much. She did not want to leave because of the garden of the house. The house in Abadan was not a normal house for Firoozeh. “[She] witnessed firsthand the magic that happened every night as I slept; tomatoes ripened overnight, flowers opened upon mutual consensus, and swarms of insects appeared from where, I never know. But that's not all. There was mystery where I could not see. (*Laughing*, 11)

However Tehran was much different than Abadan. In Tehran, they moved into an apartment which she “hated instantly” (*Laughing*, 12) There were “more cars on [their] busy street..Tehran was full of strangers who were always in a hurry. The buildings were lit up all the time. The noise never stopped. The city was missing an Off button” (Laughing, 12). There were many reasons for her to hate Tehran. In contrast to her life in Abadan, in Tehran she could not walk on the streets for hours lost in thoughts.

As a result, when her husband Francois, suggests her to go to India for their honeymoon, she answers only: "Non, merci."(Dumas, Funny: 59) She explains her reasons for this answer, in a comic way;

> *To Francois' family, a vacation meant going to their secluded seaside villa in Greece … fishing or looking for ancient relics that washed up on the beach. To my family, a vacation usually meant going to relative's house and sleeping on the floor, squeezed between several cousins… I had to ride a similar bus to school in fourth grade, and I found it neither quaint nor charming. Ignoring any notions of safety, the bus driver packed in twice as many kids as seats … If every-one has a lifetime quota of bug bites, I reached mine by age six. My father used to tell me that I must be the sweetest person because the mosquitoes bit me more than anyone else … It rarely rained, but when it did, the dirt became mud, and mud on the face is far more annoying than dirt … Tiny frogs covered the town. The streets andulated under a blanket of frogs. Before we entered any building, we had to scrape off the layer of sticky frog guts clinging to our shoes. (Funny,59-61)*

Having grown up in southern Iran, she experienced enough physical discomforts to have a good time at the United States.

In Iran, Vacation for Firoozeh and her family meant going to the Caspian Sea. This means the same for ninety percent of Iranians too. Every summer, her father, Kazem, employer of the National Iranian oil company, allowed its employees the use of its villas in a town on the Caspian shore, where was two day drive from Abadan. Every summer, the five of the family pile into their car to or the north of Iran, because of unbearable desert climate of Abadan. According to Firoozeh, "the drive between Tehran and the Caspian sea is one of the most beautiful stretches of land [she has] ever seen. The lush scenery offered moves shades of green than I saw anywhere else"(Funny, 53).

In America, they lived on the California coast but rarely went to the beach. The water was too cold and the waves were too big. "Longing for warm water one year," they have decided to go on a vacation to Hawaii. Kazem's favorite spot on Planet Earth is Las Vegas and Firoozeh as a child, “had to endure endless ‘vacations’ to that den o'sin in the desert” (*Funny*, 50). “I hated it, but Las Vegas was cheap and so was my father, so off we went” (*Funny*, 50). The funniest matter Firoozeh remembers from this trip is, her mother's holding the Koran at the top of the door frame while they each walked under it. That is the ritual event, done by anybody in Iran. But this was Las Vegas. Firoozeh says: "I'm quite sure the Prophet Muhammad would not have approved of" (Funny, 51) .

Kazem had returned to Iran after graduation full of American optimism. With its vast oil reserves and abundance of smart people, Iran was not satisfying his needs.

British were the first to realize the huge financial potential of the vast Iranian oil reserves. British Petroleum negotiated an agreement with the Iranian government that allowed the British to drill for and sell the oil in exchange for a small sun. Then the prime minister of time in 1950s nationalized Iran's oil. But when Firoozeh was born in Abadan in 1965, there was no longer a large British population in town. In

the absence of the British, the residents of Abadan benefited from a city built by thoughtful British planners. Swimming pools, club houses and very orderly housing developments, made Abadan look different from any other Iranian city. In 1974, Kazem Jazayeri and his family featured in the local Whittier newspaper under the caption “Ambassadors sans portfolio” (*Laughing*, 53). The journalist was assigned to make an interview with them about Iran, their nature land. To the journalist Kazem said that “Iran is not an Arab country” (*Laughing*, 54); Farshid shared his feeling about American schools; Mother Nazireh said that she hadn’t been homesick once since they had come to America and that they felt the schools were marvelous.

3.2.2. OVER-CONCERNED IRANIAN PARENTS

Unfortunately, selfishness is the most destructive force in American society. On the opposite side, self-sacrifice is the most destructive force in Iranian culture. Both extremes are wrong. The first approach results in aggression whereas the second approach causes self humiliation. Iranian parents unlike American ones actually take care of their kids by forcing them to do what they want. They take their responsibilities too seriously. For an Iranian parent, the biggest challenge is to raise their children. The problem does not disappear when the children grow up. The challenge of being a good parent is always there.

Iranian parents always have doubts about their way of bringing up their children. They always blame themselves if their children do not succeed in life. Often they put the blame on themselves and for their own failures. Scholars argue that over-parenting may be an obstacle to the development of the child or his or her social skills.

In an adopted country the situation gets more complicated since the parents might be grown up in a bicultural environment and suffer from its consequences, but

the children, who are born into that adopted culture, are not affected by the new culture as their parents did.

This situation can be witnessed in the adaptation process of the Iranians in the U.S. If the children are not born in the new country then, together with their parents they become the victims of clash of cultures and cross-cultural effects.

Most of the Iranian parents respect their native culture. They want their children to adhere to religious and traditional values. They want them to reconcile the differences between their native culture and the adopted culture in America, and to find the practicable methods of assimilation or acculturation.

Iranian parents are over protective and they do not treat their children as adults or grown-ups. They feel sad when their children want to pass their times with their friends. Being grown-up in an environment where there were close relations between relatives and family members, they have hard times in accepting the present situation. For a typical Iranian parent, good parenting is to know when to push and when not to push.

Massoume Price in *Patriarchy and Parental Control in Iran argues the following;*

> *Traditionally Iranian culture has been patriarchal with the father or the husband as the head of the family/household. The modernization processes that took place in the twentieth century, until the Islamic revolution, changed the situation with the modern and educated classes. However, the masses and the more traditional classes remained more or less the same. Since the revolution, patriarchy has been promoted and strengthened by reverting to ancient Islamic codes and with enforced patriarchal practices such as controlling female appearance and mobility. Patriarchy has been a major institution in the area since ancient times and is deeply rooted in religious, legal and cultural practices. It is portrayed extensively in Persian literature and metaphors, cultural constructs, ethics, explanatory systems both religious and secular and involves control of both wives and children by the husband or the father and in their absence other male relatives.(1)*
>
> …
>
> *Cultural practices associated with patriarchy have changed immensely during the last century and with the modern classes there is a balance in power that*

is observed by both males and females. However such observances are voluntary and are not backed by legal codes that guarantee balance of power between the two and their children. The current legal system in Iran gives superior legal status to the male head of the family as opposed to his wife/wives and children, therefore strengthens the patriarchal system. Majority of the Iranians who have migrated to North America constitute the more modern and educated classes who are conscious of gender inequality, promote equal opportunities for both males and females, willingly share power in the household and have great respect for family, particularly children. However, it should be remembered that Iranian culture is class based and is divided between traditional and modern classes as well as upper, middle and lower classes. Different classes have different attitudes, cultural practices and while modern classes are striving to overcome patriarchy and gender inequalities, the more traditional classes may be defending and practicing such cultural ideas.(2)

...

However with the affluent, children do not get involve in every matters, they are paid for and looked after long past adolescence. It is a common practice for the rich to buy properties, expensive cars, designer cloths and pricey jewelry for their children. At the time of marriage, the groom's father or paternal close relatives normally pay the very high cost of elaborate weddings. In return children are required to be obedient, polite, and respectful of parents and other older members of the family.(2)

…

In short, although there is much parental control in Iranian families, the warmth, affection and immense love that most Iranians have for their children eases the tensions and most children willingly feel obliged to trust, obey the rules and comply with their parent's guidance and advices. (2)

In her memoirs Firoozeh narrates her story of going to a camp at 1976 in the U.S. Although she never spent a night away from her parents up to that time, and without knowing what a person does in a camp, she decides to go. Her parents immediately assign Farshid who was then eighteen, the task of finding the right camp for her. After so many researches, he finds an appropriate one. This event is a good example of how Iranian parents are concerned about their children.

In fact for Iranians concern for the child continues after marriage of the son or daughter. In case of Firoozeh Dumas, we witness that after getting married, Firoozeh and Francois, rent an apartment at San Francisco where an earthquake happens. Firoozeh worries more about her parents' concern when they hear the news, more than her own distress.

Dumas explains how her mother once called her in the middle of the day to tell her to make sure if Firoozeh wears shoes when cleaning the attic because she had heard about a woman who, while cleaning her attic barefoot, was beaten by a rare brown spider whose venom cut off the circulation to her extremities and the woman's nose fell-off. She wrote: “My Parents do not limit themselves to worrying about things that have actually happened” (*Funny*, 155).

Firoozeh like other Iranian parents, does not show any interest to read books about psychology of children to guide her. She was not really about to read any books on child rearing actually. She says: "In reality, I had no idea what to do with my son. All I knew was that I was completely gaga over him so I did what I had to do” (Funny, 109).

Firoozeh found her mother’s excessive worrying to be beyond annoying. In *Laughing with an Accent* she narrates her feeling and observations about her mother’s concerns as such: “I knew that in her eyes and the eyes of her generation of Iranians, I was a horrible daughter. A dutiful daughter would stay home and keep her mother company” (135).

Duma shares the same concerns of her mother today as a mother of three children. We find her worries about her children at her essays, *Forever young* and also *Mall Together Now: A Mother's Reluctant Journey to the White-hot Center of the Outlet Center*.

CONCLUSION

Firoozeh Dumas, is the first Iranian-American woman writer ever to be considered for the prestigious Thurber Prize for American Humor. This study concentrated on Dumas' two memoirs namely *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America* and *Laughing without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen*.

The memoirs of Firoozeh Dumas were analyzed in order to explore the effects of cultural differences in the life of a writer with two nationalities. Dumas' memoirs were chosen because they constitute a good example for showing the importance of narrative strategies for fostering cultural understanding between countries.

In this study works of an Iranian-American women writer is selected for two reasons. The first reason is the enormous success of the Iranian women memoirists in the last two decades. The second reason is the popularity of Firoozeh Dumas both in Iran and in the U.S. Being popular and widely read in Iran was one of the main criteria of this thesis, since the books of most of the Iranian women memoirists are banned in Iran.

The topic of this thesis was the study of cultural differences as depicted by an Iranian-American author in her memoirs, where she compares her Iranian heritage with U.S customs. The memoirs chronicle an Iranian family's American journey from the eyes of a master storyteller. They narrate a selection of historical events and interesting stories of religion, custom, and culture in a humorous way. Every story celebrates the power of love, understanding and concentrating on similarities rather than differences.

Memoirs as a genre is a work of narrative built directly from the memory of its writer. The thesis of this study was to investigate the sincerity of Firoozeh Dumas in her writings while she tried to form a bridge between her native country and the adopted country. Many times in her memoirs she argues that Iranians and Americans have more in common than they have differences. In addition to that, she tries to portray a new picture of Iran for Americans, whose older picture is not a pleasant one.

She narrates heartwarming and hilarious things in her books, and appears as a stand-up comedienne just not to contradict with her newly built Iranian portrayal. Humor isn't usually the first thing that comes to mind when talking about Iran and Iranians in the U.S., but Firoozeh Dumas works hard to make it as such.

By looking at Dumas' collected memories, this thesis tried to scrutinize the way she narrated her old and the new country and concentrated on the objectivity of the writer. The thesis focused on the narration of the cultural differences between the two countries, Iran and the U.S, to find out whether the writer was siding with one of the countries or not. Because we are having a look at Iranian-American relations through Dumas' memoirs. The stories she depicts and the people she describes are all part of her remembrance and experiences. It is therefore, crucial to detect if the memoirist has certain priorities or favorites of certain type.

For that reason in the first chapter of this study, a comparative study on memoir is conducted. By giving examples and exploring the memoirs and the autobiographical writings of Iranian women immigrants like Nahid Rachlin, Marjane Satrapi, Azar Nafisi, Mahnaz Koushan and others, beside Firoozeh Dumas, a bigger picture was tried to be drawn.

In the second chapter with subtitles such as the U.S role in the Iranian Revolution and the effects of the Iran Hostage Crisis on Iranian-American relations, a historical background of the memoirs were tried to be studied. Dumas and other Iranian writer's memories from those days are depicted. Customs of Iranians living in and abroad, are described.

In the third chapter, the two memoirs of the writer *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America* and *Laughing Without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen* were analyzed in terms of characters and the family structure. Also in this chapter the life Iranian women and religion's effects on their life are discussed. Their jobs, family relations, education and effects of customs on their marriage are delineated by giving examples from Dumas' memoirs. Family structure and parent's concern about their children are compared in both Iran and United States with Dumas's point of view.

Some eras in the history of a country are more important than others. Social, economic, political and cultural changes occasionally converge and reshape the way a society understands itself and sets its future course. The importance of Iranian Revolution is obvious in the whole Iranian-American writers of memoirs, and Dumas is not an exception. The Revolution was one of the most important turning points for Iranians both living in Iran or abroad. Firoozeh talks about the need for tolerance and diversity, and remembers the terrifying atmosphere she witnessed during the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979. Writers like her form a bridge between the two cultures, and help in understanding the value of cultural pluralism.

Dumas, conveys many messages about American culture and also her native country, Iran, through her memoirs. She addresses the issues of family values, adjusting oneself to a new environment, tolerating people of other cultures and most critical of all, determining where one stands in this complex world; and how all of these experiences seem much better later on in life when we are able to look back at them and just laugh.

For Iranians family is the most important social institution and children are the focal point of this institution. They are loved, adorned and sometimes spoiled. For many families, the relationship parents have with their children is more important than the marital bound between the husband and wife. Many Iranian parents simply live for their children.

In sum, *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America* and *Laughing Without an Accent: Adventures of a Global Citizen* have the wisdom of hindsight and the humor of books, help diffuse the fear and tension inherent in first encounters with a culture not always well understood, also help us see the world through immigrant glasses, when these immigrants try to create a space for themselves in a new country. Anyone who is from an immigrant family, or who knows of an immigrant family will absolutely find many things in common in Dumas' descriptions. And even if someone does not fall in either category, it will still make him/her laugh.

To conclude, both of the memoirs give a first-hand look at what it is meant to be an immigrant, by strengthening our understanding of the events through the American lenses, since the writer explicitly sides with the U.S. and narrates certain historical events from an American point of view.

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