PREFACE

Indian writers have made the most significant contribution in the field of fiction. Among Indian English novelists, Shashi Deshpande occupies a prominent position and has won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel, That Long Silence. She has sensitively treated typical Indian themes and has portrayed contemporary middle-class women with rare competence. In a wider sense, her subject matter is nothing less than human predicament. Her fiction, however, has not received the attention it so richly deserves. The aim of the present thesis is to evaluate the novels of Shashi Deshpande form a feminist perspective. Most of Deshpande’s protagonists are women who are education and exposed to western ideas. The emotional upheavals in the minds of these women and their reactions to various issues related to women, caught between tradition and modernity, are susceptible to treatment form a feminist angle.

The women of today stands poised on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago; she does not believe that woman is an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive. This awakening of the woman’s consciousness as delineated by Shashi Deshpande in her novels deserves a close study to assess the extent of articulation of a woman’s point of view. Hence the need for a close study of Shashi Deshpande’s novels as products of feminism which offers a fresh perspective for critical analysis linking literature with real life situations. It is hoped that this thesis will promote a better understanding of Indian English fiction in general and Shashi Deshpande’s feminism in particular.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter
‘Introduction’, traces the background of Indian English fiction and formative influences on the novelist as well. It also represents the contribution of women novelists in Indian English, how in spite of the educational opportunities and economics independence, women are the victim of domestic injustice and the crude customs of our society. But with the emergence of women writers writing in English in India, there began the battle for emancipation to communicate to the world their own bitter experiences as women, as well as their ideas of social reform as creative person.

The second chapter ‘Feminism’, unravels the meaning of ‘feminism’, and how it gradually spread across the world demanding complete rights of women-social, political, economic, educational and individual. Due to the emergence of this feminist movement in the society the women now have gained personal as well as social liberty to voice their problems and to protest against injustices done to them in the same patriarchal and male ordained society. In ultimate analysis, feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society.

Third chapter ‘Quest for Selfhood’, concerns with the problems of all protagonists in Deshpande’s novels and their quest for identity. But to evolve their own identity they must first fight patriarchy. In the beginning her protagonists do not revolt but after sometime they have gradual changes and each of her novels ends on a note of optimism and determination by its protagonists who resolve to take reins of their life into their hands. In this way, they become quite sure of themselves, of their right and their place in society. They become aware of their existence and no longer submissive or living in silent.
In forth chapter, ‘Fractured Consciousness’, Deshpande explores the disturbed psyche of her protagonists who have many thoughts, perceptions and feelings in their mind but aspects of thought itself are nonverbal. They can not express their ideas before male dominated society and suffer in their lives.

The fifth chapter, ‘Feminine Awareness as Marital Discord’, discusses Deshpande’s novels where heroines are courageous and educated but in order to seek their individuality some times they revolt against the prevailing social system and that becomes the main factor of matrimonial discord in their life. Deshpande also concentrates on the theme of meaninglessness and sexual confusion suffered by her protagonists, in tradition-oriented institutions.

The last chapter ‘Conclusion’, offers a summing up of the thesis highlighting the feminist perspective in the novels of Deshpande. Operating within the framework of a male-dominated and tradition-bound society, Deshpande’s protagonists are conscious of their predicament as victims of inequality. It is shown that Deshpande’s depiction of her protagonists is realistic to the core in, as much as she does not succumb to the temptation of creating exceptionally strong women characters who revolt against conventional morality. Deshpande seems to write about the middle-class Indian women and their feelings, not as their champion but as an articulator. Moreover, Deshpande has optimistic attitude and suggests that women should not merely lament their victimage but accept their own share in perpetuating patriarchy, understand themselves and work hand to realize their hidden potentiality.