PREFACE

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is recognized internationally as a major theorist and social commentator. Today, even after four decades after her death, her work stands as a major theoretical contribution to feminist thought. She offers a perspective on major issues of gender, the origins of women's subjugation, the struggle to achieve both autonomy and intimacy in human relationship and new strategies for rearing and educating future generations to create a humane and nurturing environment. Gilman wrote that women's subordination will only end. When women lead the struggle for their own autonomy, thereby freeing men as well as themselves because men suffer from the distortions that come from the dominance just as women are scared by the subjugation imposed on them.

Gilman wrote about ethics, which defined the awareness of collective rights and duties. She wrote about mothering which she saw as central to developing a new spirit of community. She wrote about the house, the prison for the private servant called the wife-mother. She wrote about work, which she argued was the most important activity in defining a sense of self, because what we do has greater impact on us than what is done to us. She believed that the work traditionally assigned to women that is rearing
children and nurturing men, was important, as important as the public work of men, but that it was demeaned by being carried out in an inadequate and destructive way: privately and in isolation and by automatic assignment to all females, rather than socially and collectively by those most gifted for parenting.

An attempt is made in this thesis to show how Gilman’s concerns with the problem of women’s space, later influenced a new wave of utopian feminism.

I express my deep gratitude to my research supervisor, Dr. P. Hannah Padma, Associate Professor of English, who enlightened me on various aspects of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s writings. Her scholarly advice has been of immense help to me.

I express my heartfelt thanks to the Head of the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the other members of the staff for their encouragement and help.

I am deeply indebted to my brother, Mr. M. N. Reddi, I.P.S., for his constant encouragement and to my sister, Mrs. M. Uma Devi, for her ardent prayers for the successful completion of my work.
I extend my grateful thanks to the Indo-American Centre for International Studies, Hyderabad for providing the required source material on my research topic. My indebtedness to the Charlotte Perkins Gilman's critics is duly acknowledged in the dissertation and the bibliography.

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'Most utopias are born of utopias, however pretentious the claims to complete novelty may be. Utopian fantasies are as book-ridden as philosophical arguments, dependent upon an eternal dialogue with forerunners.'

- FRANK E. MANUEL