Abstract

The present thesis intends to examine three novels of Jane Austen — *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Mansfield Park*, and four novels of Shashi Deshpande — *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence*, *A Matter of Time*, and *Roots and Shadows*. This thesis examines the contributions of women characters to society and to social change. So an effort is made to study these novels with the framework of sociological perspective.

The introduction briefly discusses the aim and scope of the dissertation. It concisely deals with and explains the images of women in the novels of Jane Austen and Shashi Deshpande. Their novels are a good source to discern the status of women related to love, marriage, money and family in a social context.

The introduction also briefly discusses the historical and social survey of marriage. I concentrate mainly on changes of attitudes towards marriage in British and Indian society. The eighteenth century is a very significant period in order to analyse how the society at that time dealt with love and marriage. The position of women in different societies all over the world is different from that of men. It is the socio-cultural factor that determines the status of women in a society. In this thesis, only some of the main
perspective in feminist thought has explained. It is attracted both to those forms of feminism that describe women’s are- at the marriage and on the periphery.

I have divided my thesis into two chapters: Jane Austen and Shashi Deshpande. The chapters are devoted to an analysis of the particular features concerning the topic discussed in Austen’s and Deshpande’s novels. The thesis has been organized into following chapters:

The first chapter elaborates the status and the prospects of unmarried women in the eighteenth-century British society. On concrete examples from Austen’s select novels, I illustrate her attitude towards the position of women in the society of her time. I am shown here the different opinions women have about love, money and marriage at that time. There are marriages of love, convenience, physical attraction and mercenary. The marriage of some characters is a balance between head and heart and it is due to love, while the marriage between some characters is due to physical attraction and mercenary. The reasons for getting married were many, but economics played a major role and helped to define the culture of the era.

I choose Jane Austen because the main theme of her works is marriage and personal relationships. She demonstrates the many faces of nineteenth century marriage through her fictional characters. These marriages contribute to the theme that a strong marriage takes time to build and must be based on mutual feeling, understanding, and respect. She concentrates in her novels mainly on personal relationships because it was the
only matter she could observe subjected to her limited view of an early-nineteenth-century woman writer.

The second chapter is concerned with married couples in Indian society, and the position of women in society as they are reflected in Shashi Deshpande’s novels. In this chapter on Shashi Deshpande’s novels, I discuss the status of Indian women related to love, marriage, money and family. Deshapande’s novels are about women’s quest for self and struggle to free themselves from the restrictions imposed by society and culture.

This chapter aims at interpreting some select novels of Shashi Deshpande from the feminist point of view. Deshpande’s novels contain so much that can be regarded as feminist thought: the gender roles, women’s sexuality, self-discovery and so on. Her feminism is peculiarly Indian in the sense that it is born out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities.

To conclude, I have tried to analyse the images of women and marriage in different periods. I have come closer to a different perspective of love and marriage that took place in different culture. The chapter focuses Jane Austen and Shashi Deshpande who bear a curious resemblance to one another in certain aspects but are yet very different in many aspects. In particular the role of women was not quite different in the past to the role of women in the present day. It is extremely interesting to study and compare the nature of the portrayal of women of these two writers.
I have observed that in reality, Austen cannot be evaluated as a feminist writer without first examining the eighteenth century English society in which she lived and placed her heroines. But to me, Deshpande can be evaluated as a feminist writer. Her novels come to an end with a note of compromise rather than revolt and revenge which is the basic attribute of Indian feminism. Deshpande reaches to the conclusion that there is no refuge, other than one's own self, and escape is a ridiculous idea. She realizes that she cannot attain happiness through anyone else. Deshpande’s novels equipped with a new education and sociability have different perspective on the images of woman. Deshpande is the one of the Indian writers to have made bold attempts at giving a voice to the disappointments and frustration of women characters. Her novels come to an end with a note of compromise rather than revolt and revenge which is the basic attribute of Indian feminism.