

Woman's Painful journey of Self-discovery in Jaishree Misra's Ancient Promises

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Abstract

Ancient Promises is a semi- autobiographical novel of Jaishree Misra. It is a story of Protagonist's constant struggle that goes on her life as an affectionate and submissive daughter, an empathetic but guilty lover, a restless and depressed wife, a helpless and desolate mother – a woman constantly in search of an identity, a woman pursuing her rightful share of happiness. The issues which have been treated largely in her novels are love, marriage, divorce, and problem of rehabilitation after divorce, extend of liberty and freedom to the female desire for bondage. In Ancient promises the life of Janu (Protagonist) can be compared to common traditional Indian women where the traditional system extends women suffering. Janu marries Suresh of Maraar family with an expectation of beginning a new life but she soon realizes that she is only a namesake wife leading a loveless life by gaining respect and honour of being a wife, daughter- in- law of a wealthy family in Kerala. Her life is become even more in the path of tragedy when she comes to know that her child is mentally disabled. After certain period Janu desires to get out of the traditional bounds and live an independent life by keeping her daughter as a heart reason for leaving the home.

Key Words: *Love, Marriage, Divorce, Motherhood, Search for an identity*

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A free and autonomous being like all creatures – (a woman) finds herself living a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other.

- Simon de Beauvoir

Feminist Literature in English is certainly not a recent innovation. It has been there ever since perspectives on life were recorded in the medium of literature, though it certainly has come to its own of late of recent origin again is the feminist perception of literature.

Modern Indian writers tend to depict the oppression of women with greater self – consciousness, a deeper sense of involvement and often with a sense of outrage. Earlier writers had deified and eulogized women’s sufferings but the writers of the later part of the post independent period have unpalliatively presented their suffering with much greater realism. In the contemporary Indian fiction Ruth Praver Jhubvala, Anita desai and many others are well known women novelists. To this list of women writers Jaishree Misra a woman novelist may be added. In the later years, the gradual growth of fiction in India is made by gradual shifting of focus us from the external world to the inner world of the individual. The women novelist of present period concentrate on the complex problems of battle of women namely the career, motherhood, marriage, sexual and economic freedom. In this instance it is important to discuss the prominent post colonial authors who are the contemporaries of Anita desai. Jaishree Misra is an eminent writer who beautifully portrays about a woman how she thinks and feels and behaves when it comes to love and marriage. Misra’s protagonists are liberated women, they are educated and able to live individually they do not depend on men. The issues which have been treated largely in her novels are love, marriage, divorce, and problem of rehabilitation after divorce, extent of liberty and freedom to the female desire for bondage, recognition to the quest for bondage and crisis of conscience and values.

In a traditional Indian society, marriage is not an end. Marriage restricts the movement towards a perception of herself as an independent human being and not buffeted by the circumstance or the social

prescriptions. It signifies the equal partnership and intimate relationship between a male and a female. A family consists of members related by blood as well as by marriage. Family structures and role relationships differ from community to community. The familial rules and the codes of behavior prescribed were in favor of promoting patriarchal values. Since the beginning of time, man has been related to power and strength. Man controls, subjugates, and has always enjoyed his pre-eminence. A woman carries out her duties without expecting any recognition. The roles and behavior deemed appropriate to the sexes were expressed through values, customs, laws and social roles. The disparity between man and woman is a result of the complex operation of economic, political, social and other factors. In spite of the significant changes in woman's position in society in the post-independence era, she is still not totally emancipated. These contradictions can best be understood by examining the Indian social structure that comprises institutions like caste, joint family and religious values and practices consolidating women's subordinate position.

A woman in Indian society marries not just the man but also his family and subsequently loses her identity in marriage, relinquishes her freedom and sets about pleasing everybody. But the new generation of women with their new-found release from matrimonial bondage adopts different perspectives, and revolt against the old order. Jaishree women are such liberated individuals in search of a niche in their lives through escapades.

Jaishree Misra novel basically portrays quest for kind texture in women's life in the busy patriarchal society, where in men have all the privileges, and woman are burdened with only responsibilities. Her novels are also built in the question of marriage and fidelity in the family system. **The Protagonist's painful journey of self discovery in Ancient Promises:** Jaishree Misra in her "Ancient Promises" highlights the constant struggle that goes on between the protagonist Janu and her parents because of her love affair. It is a novel that gives equal importance to the anxiety that parent of a teenage-girl undergoes and the urgent

need for girls like Janu to be understood by their parents. It is the story of Janaki (Janu) and her journey from a teenager girl to a traditional wife, daughter-in-law and then mother of Riya with learning disability.

Janu's first meeting with Arjun happened through Leena her classmate. After a couple of weeks of their encounter, Janu and Arjun started having casual meetings. They shared some interests. Janu was worried if, she, a sixteen – year-old, was ready to experience that splendid feeling called “love”. When she was cat on the wall, not able to identify it was love or not, she thought about her parents. She had never before kept a secret unknown from her parents. But now, the secret of loving Arjun and hiding it from her parents was sheer thrill.

Janu's father was totally against the concept of love marriages. He had never liked young people falling in love nor wanted his daughter to get influenced by all the ‘love’ ideas that go around her. Janu's parents led a conventional life and wished the same for their daughter. The idea of a child taking a decision regarding her future partner was unimaginable to them. They believed in children settling in life with their parents choicest blessings. Both Janu's mother and father had left the most important decisions in their lives to be taken by their parents. They firmly felt that their parents knew what would be best for them.

Janu and Arjun started to meet at Chor Minar. The excuse that Janu gave at her home was ‘drama practice’ and ‘Mathematics Tuition’. Soon, Janu was caught red – handed by her parents and it was here that she lost the trust and love of her parents, especially her father's. Her father became enraged when Janu lied; from then on Janu lost all her freedom. She started spending all her time in her room and kept looking at her text books. After Janu finish her schooling, she desired to continue her education. But, her parents had given up all hopes in sending their Janu to college. Janu, during her visit to Kerala, was engaged to one Mr. Suresh of Maraar family. Janu agreed to it as she wished to compensate for upsetting her parents. Meanwhile, Arjun had secured admission at Hull University and decided to join his mother in England.

The wedding was took place at Guruvayur temple one of Kerala's holiest shrines.

“On my eighteenth birthday. It would be a double blessing, everyone said, a birthday and a wedding at Guruvayur.”

Janu's married life was not very good but it was not very bad. Her in-laws allowed her to continue her studies, made her partner in the family business. On the other hand her husband was ignorant due to his business and mother in law was sharp tongued. Janu thought that an entry of grand child will bring new respect and love from their Maraar family; she gave birth to a beautiful girl child and named her as Riya but to her shock that child was mentally disabled. She could not bear the words of the pediatrician who examined Riya:

“This child is definitely mentally handicapped. There is no doubt, see she has all the features, high arched palate, tongue-thrust,’ concluding with a flourish, ‘in fact I think that she will never even speak.”

The Maraar's remained untouched with Riya like Janu. She could not rationalize that because Riya was theirs own flesh and blood. She decided to give full support with all sides and first She wanted to give her child a good education so she got admission in the local school for Riya, from where Janu got the advice about the education for mentally disabled children and also for her studies with scholarship. So she decided to leave for her daughter's treatment, to pursue her studies and, to escape from her marriage because she did not get any support from her husband who always had the mind to escape from the problem without facing it. She adjusted in the family about ten years with all these problems and with little remembrance of Arjun.

When she came to Delhi to attend the interview for scholarship study she happened to meet Leena as a married woman and a mother of a child. In her house Janu also met Arjun. She coincidentally collided with Arjun, carried away by their old deep emotions she literally betrayed her

husband, and decided to go to England to be with Arjun. She desperately wanted to end her marriage and had a plan to go England with Riya.

After she returned from Delhi to Kerala she was waiting for a good time to speak to Suresh about her love with Arjun. When they picked up Riya from Janu's mother house who left her there during the absence of Janu in Kerala, they stopped in a restaurant for a coffee, during that time Janu opened her mind without any hesitation. This made Suresh enraged over Janu. He thought if Janu went along with Arjun, the surroundings will talk that Suresh's wife eloped with someone else. So he wanted to stop her idea by telling (spreading the rumor) that she gone mad. The whole Maraar family tortured her in words. She fought against beyond her limits and then she was taken by her mother. Janu was taken to Chottanikara; it's a place where evil spirits have gone out of the body which fighting to get hold of their minds. Janu told the incidents happened in the Maraar family to her mother.

When Janu's mother heard and came to know about the Janu's bitter experience in the Maraar house she dropped the idea of sending back her daughter to that house. She also preferred divorce for her daughter through proper manner and they approached Mr.Madhavan Menon, a lawyer for supporting theirs. On the other side Suresh didn't accept for divorce. So Janu came out of the house and demanded for Riya to be with her to England. But Suresh didn't send Riya with Janu. He kept her with him and Riya lived in the Maraar family.

Janu went to England and wish to study special education there and also start her new life. After spending three and half months with Arjun, she realized that her daughter was her first priority and she cannot live without her. She came back to India, where her mother struggled with Suresh for divorce during Janu's absence. This time Janu got divorce and custody of her daughter.

“An unhappy marriage would have been a price worth paying for my own daughter to have had good marriage prospects”

The story ends on a hopeful note that someday day Janu will marry Arjun and they will live happily ever after.

In a patriarchal male dominated society, it is the male who shout, hurl, abuses, bully, reproach, criticize and it is the women who listen, tolerate and remain passive. But Jaishree women are different. They are new woman who resist back and win in their life.

Here when we discuss about the Meta ethical perspectives that Janu's reunion with Arjun is unbearable one in orthodox Indian family and of the Indian culture. She was also grown up in well and good family but she done it means, something makes her to take that bold decision. She expects the some love and honour from the husband's family but she never gains that till her life in the Maraar family. So her love with Arjun in the deep heart induces her to choose the life which she wants to live. Before that she wants to free herself and her daughter from the miserable condition where there are birds in a golden cage.

Jaishree Misra does not argue against marriage but she is against the parent's compulsion of marriage and she demands for an equal importance and some freedom in Man –woman relationship. According to our Indian society, a woman leaving of home with her boy friend is a very great offence especially after marriage. She knows that very well but she crosses the ethical rules when she comes to the conclusion that she may not live happily in this house and also it spoils the life of her child.

Thus the present day feminist thoughts seeks to destroy hierarchy of masculinity but not demand them to give respect but they want the masculine to just give their ears to the words of the feminine part. For this changes and revolutions take place and women are too advanced to acquire their own identity in the society.

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