

SUCCESSFUL SELF-RESISTANCE OF WOMAN IN JAISHREE MISRA'S ANCIENT PROMISES

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Abstract

Jaishree Misra's **Ancient Promises**, a sensitive story of a girl's exertions to find her destination in life, is full of psychological observations, and culminates in a well-balanced view of life. Uprooted from her home and the familiar world of Delhi at the age of eighteen to a highly conservative and upper-class Nair family in Kerala, suffering from the wrenches of separation from her first love, married to a man who is neither good nor bad but simply an "expert in the art of escape," and surrounded by horrible and sly in-laws who will never let her belong to their world, the problems Janu has to face are numerous. All her efforts to ingratiate herself to the family of her husband, which includes even producing a child who is supposed to bridge the gap between herself and her new family, are in vain. The paper highlights the resistance of woman against the oppressive measures of different cultures.

Keywords: Cultural Difference, Patriarchy, Male Domination.

The present paper explores how Jaishree Misra's semi-autobiographical novel **Ancient Promises** looks into the aftermath of marriage of two in two different cultures, unhealthy customs and traditions which involves female suppression of the male chauvinistic society and women's own subservient mentality in India. Jaishree Misra specifies how the institution of marriage of two different cultures becomes a burden in this male chauvinistic society. The paper explores the journey of Janaki alias Janu who survives the strong domination of patriarchy and attains the affirmation. Jaishree Misra's story recapitulates the significance of universal quest of women for self-realization and self-identity. The paper tries to cross-examine the ideas of resistance in cultural dislocation.

Jaishree Misra decorates a vital position among the contemporary Indian women writers in English. She shovels into the major issues and concerns of human psyche to depict a clear and real picture of the society. Her novels always bring the important themes of struggle, confusion, and crisis, role of education, self-realization and endurance with a series of women characters with high caliber. In her semi-autobiographical debut novel **Ancient Promises**, Jaishree Misra unveils the moving story of Janaki, a strong-willed but, dutiful woman who dares to challenge the set norms to find the true happiness in a rightful manner. She is a Malayali Nair girl born and brought up at Delhi, where she feels at home than at her ancestral land. The term survival seems self-explanatory. It stands for continuing to live or exist.

Ancient Promises is a story of a strong-willed woman that is how a reader would love to

describe it. The famous Malayalam writer A. S. Priya contends that Jaishree Misra had made determined efforts to push off overwhelming bondages through her writing. She has treated the South Indian Culture especially Keralite culture in the novel. The Western lifestyle for freedom gets rooted in her mind during her school days. Janu's life takes a new turn at the age of sixteen, when she meets Arjun, the local school cricketing hero. Their friendship slowly blooms into romance and eventually takes a nasty turn when Janu's parents get wind of her romantic escapades. Their romance seems to meet an end when, Arjun leaves for England for his higher studies. Janu tears for the disapproval of her father about her love:

I was fairly sure my parents would disapprove; I'd heard Dad harrumph loudly at love scenes in films, worried they would fill my head with silly notions. Love, for him, had been the stirring in his heart when his mother had shown him the picture of a fresh-faced girl she'd chosen for him to marry eighteen years ago. This running-around-trees business was for film stars and fools, he often said. (23)

It shows the nature of the typical Indian father or mother who neither likes nor supports the love affair of his or her wards. Further Janu reveals: “. . . I'm tired of fighting off my family, they've proven their love for me in the eighteen years it's taken to bring me up. And I just can't believe they'd push me into something that would be wrong for me. I know you think of it as a stupidly blind kind of trust, but there it is” (63). She thinks of acceptance from her parents about her love affair but it does not happen

Janu's parents take her to Kerala and just like any other teenage girl Janu feels unsure of her future with Arjun. Janu enters a new world of lifestyle at Kerala. The wings of her carefree life gets crippled as she agrees to marry according to the wishes of her parents. She gets married to Suresh from the socially respected Maraar family on her eighteenth birthday. She says:

Perhaps, just perhaps, having a child would solve my problems more easily than a BA and a job. That's what I'd do. I'd have a child! She, as their grandchild, would be loved. Especially if she turned out to be the much-longed-for first grandson. And, as his mother, I'd receive a sort of instant double- promotion, so to speak. Be elevated to the position of Good Mother and Good Daughter-in-Law. And spin out the rest of my days basking in a kind of reflected glory and blissful motherhood. (63)

Janu slowly realizes that the expectations of her husband's family. They only seek their heir from her. This is the expectation of any traditional family in the southern part of India. She starts to get the effect of reality in socio-cultural set up of Kerala. Suresh, who is much older than her and he has nothing in common with her, agrees to the “alliance” because she fits into the specifications that he has laid down: 1. She has to be pretty. 2. She has to be young so that she would “adjust.” 3. She has to be able to speak English so he could take her to Bombay in the hope for expansion of his motel business. 4. Nothing else is too important.

Arjun's world now is a college in which he has joined in England. India is a country of diverse cultures and practices. The Delhi brought up girl could not adjust with the norms of the traditional family in southern region. She wants to get freedom and it is the effect of education and upbringing in the cosmopolitan setting. Hence Janaki is not ready to follow the dictations

of Maraar's family.

The rightful happiness and affection become a distant desire for Janu. She enters the typical, traditional matriarchal Maraar household. The Maraar family detests the Delhi background of Janu and encourages Suresh to be aloof or uncaring to her feelings. Years roll by and Janu expects that a birth of the child and the child will bring a change in everyone's life. Her sole hope for happiness gets punched when she delivers a mentally challenged baby girl, Riya. Ironically, though Janu prefers the open Delhi culture to the conservative culture of the Maraar family, she does not seem to be without adequate discomfiture even with the former. Being a Keralite, her assimilation in the mainstream of the capital city and its ways is hardly ever fully realized. She recalls how being a Delhite, her Keralite roots are impediment just as her being a Keralite her Delhiness is a hurdle. The author sums up her cultural predicament quite illustratively:

There was something too Delhi about me and Kerala had not liked that much. Just like the childhood holiday friend who had described me sneeringly as 'too fashiony,' reducing me to bitter tears... The odd thing was that Delhi had never taken me completely to her bosom either, possessing as I always did that faint Kerala edge. In my name and the way my parents spoke and the idlis I carried in my school lunch box instead of parathas and pickle or even salami sandwiches. Halfway children, we could have founded a world-wide club of people belonging nowhere and everywhere confused all the time by ourselves. (169)

It shows the cultural differences between North India and South India. Even their way of dressing and food items are varied.

Determined to secure a place for herself and Riya, Janu pursues her education and raises Riya without any help. Deciding to take matters into her hands, she applies to study abroad and leaves to Delhi for giving a scholarship interview. Destiny has a unique treasure in store for Janu after all these miseries. Janu plans to visit her old school friend Leena during the break between interview and the result. She meets the least expected and much-loved person there, Arjun. Old passions are aroused and the couple realize that they still feel deeply for each other. Janu decides to leave her unhappy life behind and plans to take Riya along with them.

Maraar family plays their tricks and Janu leaves for England without her lovable daughter. Arjun and Janu relive their lost loving moments in London. However, they realize that their life will be incomplete without Riya. Janu comes back to India, promising a quick return with Riya. The clouds clear away as Suresh reconciles himself to a divorce, hands over Riya and all is well that ends well.

Woman is strong enough generation after generation to receive the cultural attacks which have ordained her as an instrument for gratification of physical pleasures, as a begetter of children and a slave to man. Generally, woman's position in religion, culture and other social institutions is inferior to that of man. She is disoriented in the grill of rites and rituals, which remain the prime cause for division, conflict and subjugation. Yasmine Hussain says in **Writing Diaspora**: "Culture is not genetically inherited but is instilled by upbringing within a given cultural context or a given set of parallel contexts, within which an individual has to learn about such

ideas of race and gender” (3).

Jaishree Misra’s strength in **Ancient Promises** lies in the raw courage and urgency of a beginner, who must tell her tale which is deeply experienced. She knows her territory well – her inner universe and the narrow world of Valapadu with its hypocrisies, stuck in the simulacrum of age-old values. She describes it vividly in a few deft strokes and fleshes out her characters with closely observed details. Janu’s character is crafted with care. With a deep insight into her psyche, Jaishree Misra makes her at once vulnerable and strong. The writer has a keen ear for conversation, and uses this effectively and astutely to make the acid-tongued mother-in-law and her cronies come alive. Janu has defended her identity as an independent woman despite her marriage to Suresh and afterwards her divorce and remarriage with Arjun.

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