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## **A tedious journey from being isolated to identified in Jaishree Misra's ancient promises: A study**

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**Abstract**--Jaishree Misra the profound Indian English Novelist, through her writings centres on the conditions and stipulations of the present day women. She encourages women to have their own life rather than being dependent, her writing exposes the key essence for an urge of identity. She started her writing career with a simple hand written note which she had presented to her husband, she wrote it in a motive to explain the past hurdles which she had experienced in her life. As the event had a personal touch she further elaborated and incorporated it into her debut novel namely *Ancient Promises*. The study focuses on this particular novel, were it revolves on the life of the major Protagonist Janaki. The incidents from her childhood to adulthood is well moulded were it travels from the pathetic state of innocence, heart break, sufferings and isolation. The present paper aims on the revolution of Janaki which took place from isolation to identified, here the protagonist Janaki uses Motherhood as a tool to prevent her from dominant ideologies and assimilates the strength to breaks the shackles which had further forbidden her progress; and further it enforces the requirement of identity which is possible only by breaking the prevalent dominant ideas and by questioning against the cruel injustice.

**Keywords**--isolation, identity, motherhood, childhood, injustice.

## Introduction

Jasihree Misra started her writing career with her debut Novel *Ancient Promises* and further followed by seven novels and one Nonfiction and a collection of Poems and Co-authored a Story based on environment awareness and had translated some of her works on Malayalam, added to credit her novels had occupied its license on movies. At present she is the board member of Vahani Scholarship, her writing introspect and revolves on the inner most quest of a women and depicts for the need of self- identity, though her writings is an imaginary flow of words an intense reader might encounter the sense of daily events happening in her works. As Identity is a value that creates a sense of one's own worth. Misra focuses on the foremost significant of identity and enforces that one must be active and fearless enough to earn it, by raising their voice against the dominant regulations which had fixed its rigid stand on the society.

The Novel *Ancient Promises* reflects quite resemblance with the Writers life, where the major protagonist Janaki exhibit some personal element with Misra. The novel opens with the pessimistic note with the end of her marriage life, Janaki along with her daughter Riya and her mother are at the court and Janu receives divorce. Janaki's mother is at the brim of suffering about this incident, but Janu comforts her by stating that every end as a new start. Janu narrates the whole incident experienced in her life from the start of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday which was actually her marriage day, Birthday are the most awaited celebration which as its own significance, turning 18 for an Individual is unique because it gives a special rights of voting, decision making were the phase of childhood is lost and a sense of Adulthood gets germinated in the heart of the individuals. But Janu considers her 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday as the end of her happiness because in order to save the reputation of her family she gets married by sacrificing her love.

Marriage is the mutual acceptance between two individuals and family, each customs as its own rituals to be performed. Marriage is the union of oneness between two hearts love, respect, faithfulness, commitment, trust, intimacy are the key functioning of marriage, each philosophy as its own perspective on marriage. Chastity is the essence of marriage in Indian society a happy marriage life is viewed by its healthy love filled state, tolerance and adjustment are the key elements in a marital life. But nowadays it's a difficult factor to adjust among the couples, suspicion and lack of comfort creates conflicts and disaster, which ends up the marriage life.

Misra in the novel explores the occurrence in the present day modern society which only exhibits lack of love and hope in family life. She enforces that disaster of the unhappy marital life, lack of compatibility and parental compulsion are the key reason for futile marriage life, and views that an unhealthy marriage life would create disaster and complication. Janu the major protagonist to faces the difficulties of forced arranged marriage and encounters suffering, alienation and a sense of being lost, all the exploitation made Janu fell that she was a lifeless being. In forced marriage the Individuality and Self –esteem is been lost, A 2019 survey done by Forced Marriage unit UK states that about 80% of Women and 13% of men are the victims of forced marriage all around the world. The Indian society follows Endogamy which is prevalent in India from the past 2000-3000

years ago, when an Individual reject such Practise then it's been considered as spoiling the reputation of the family. Here Janu faces such circumstances were she loves a Punjabi boy Arjun, but her parents rejects her love and forced her to marry a boy of their own community, who belongs to the highly reputed Maraar family.

Misra's realistically exhibits her protagonist who possess a crippled life due to forced marriage, however at the second phase of her life she strengthen herself from the struggle filled miserable state and develops a courage to fight back against the injustice and gained her lost identity. Misra criticizes on the concept of marriage were women are treated as secondary and inferior, she feels that even though if a women plays a significant and multiple role as a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, they need to abide by the rules and conventions and must passively accept the pain. If a women questions against any injustice faced by her then she might be subjected to Victimization. Misra reject the notion of being passive here Janu herself was a victim for being passive towards her suffering and as a result of being passive she was been framed as mentally affected, the suffering and troubles that Janu experienced gave her strength to fight back and gain her Identity. Misra in most of her works signifies the importance of gaining Identity, women especially according to Misra must acquire knowledge and must be a Lioness towards the Hunter whoever tries to question her Identity. Janaki represents Misra who at her life path was been: innocent, passive, isolated and fearless. Even though if a women's life is filled with several luxury and comfort she feels a sense of lost when there is lack of love in a marital life.

Misra gives an actuality of the failure of the forced marriage, where Men considers themselves as a superior being and treats women as an object for their needs, he feels that the women must be surrounded by the sphere of the house and thinks himself as a soul controller. Even in this present modern world women face several restrictions from the family and society where she must fix herself in the agenda been created. Misra considers that physical abuse is as cruel as the verbal abuse. Misra's view can be related with Freire where he states: The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in her innermost being. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided between human solidarity or alienation between following prescriptions or having choices, between being spectators or actors, between speaking out or being silent. (33). In today's modern world stress is considered as a prime talk of the day if an Individual feels detached in the family it would lead to complication such as being aloof. Loneliness might take an individual to the utmost state of hatred towards life. Janaki is one such character who felt of being detached and alienated she represents the typical Indian women who first tried to reconcile and gain acceptance but all her efforts went in vain, though Janu felt fulfilled as a wife and mother it was given to her in the cost of suppression.

Misra through her Semi- Autobiographical Novel opens up her personal experience were she herself had sacrificed her education and love in order to save the reputation of her family, later by fighting and questioning back she gains all her lost desires and now a special recognition as a writer. Misra got divorced from her miserable marital life and later had a happy and contented life with her

beloved. Her daughter represented as a tool of power and strength and gave her enough courage to fight back her life and was an inspiration to write poems on Motherhood. She was the source reason for Misra to start a Special Care Resident and also she mastered two post graduate diplomas in special education thus Motherhood gave strength, courage and identity to Misra. The writer reflected herself in Janaki where her personal life experience was mirrored through Janu. Misra is been admired for presenting life like realistic character which an individual might have encountered in their life. She condemns that Women's role are only appreciated by the way they equip themselves to the expectation of others especially to that of a Men, were the personal desire of a Women is considered as insignificant.

The Novel provides a clear and actual picture of today's women in India. A successful marriage according to Misra occurs when there is a mutual respect, care and concern among the couples. She states that an amicable and better understanding would give a clear direction even in complex situation and hardship. Life is filled with tedious path which can be succeeded with immense satisfaction when there is an ability to change and adopt according to the situation. It is only the essence of love between the spouses that can make a stable life of success even in time of hardship. Janu the major Protagonist was born and brought up in Delhi to a Malayali parents, though Janu was malayali by birth, the modern lifestyle was deep uprooted in every aspects of her life. Often in her childhood Janu visits Kerala to seek the love and care of her grandparents. Through the journey from Delhi to Kerala Misra had explored the beauty of Kerala where she explains the greenery, backwaters, boats, mud houses, coconut tree and Guruvayur Temple, also Malayali words such as Chechi, Ammumma, Mami are well been depicted in the novel.

Janu's life in Delhi was filled with excitement innocence and with a touch a teenage love until the seventeen years of her life she felt that it was just like a fairy-tale. As every teenager Janu had two faces an innocent face at home and a notorious mischievous phase in school. In home being a daughter of a Military Man and a School Teacher she was brought up with strict discipline and value. Janu acted as calm and innocent her parents were the strict followers who valued their own customs and traditions of Kerala and made Janu to admire their way of life. But in schools as there was an union of Delhi and Panjabi students, Janu enjoyed the modernity being flourished among her friends and as a result of this Janu was mixed up by Delhi and Kerala way of leading life. Janu's short trip to Kerala signifies the Keralite style and her life in Delhi played a significant role to overcome from sufferings and helped her to break the traditional bond to stand up for her Identity.

A teenage love sprung in Janu in her school days, when she met Arjun who studied at the Boys School the next door. As usual lovers they meet up daily in DTC Bus, spent some time in Nehru Park and attended friends birthday party, their favourite place was Chor Minor, they often sat beneath the Gulmohar tree and dreamt about their future, and enjoyed their love life with passion along with their friends company but the love didn't lasted as they desired. Janu's passion towards Arjun can be compared with the Narrator of the work *The collected stories of Eudora Welthy*, were the narrator states:

I tried to withdraw to my most inner dream, that if touching the wrist of the boy I loved on the stair; I felt a shudder of my wish shaking the darkness like leaves where I closed my eyes, I felt the heavy weight of sweetness which always accompanied this memory, but the memory itself did not come to me...(79).

Janu's strict father even gets annoyed by the love scenes in movies and he simply switches off the T.V by blaming, what kind of movies are taken nowadays? Janu's love came to an abrupt end when her father's friend caught her on a Bike ride with Arjun, he informed this incident to his strict father. As the result of this Janu was beaten up by her father with a Bamboo stick until it got broke, her father warned her by saying that it should not repeat. Further her mother advised her by saying that nowadays boys make use of beautiful girls, and would ruin up their life by making it miserable. Meanwhile Arjun went England to continue up his higher education thus the teen love ended up within two years, and also Janu's parents decided to get their daughter married in a highly reputed Kerala family.

Janu was not ready for the marriage because she had a desire of higher Education however her choice was neglected by her parents, they took her to Kerala and selected a groom and decided to get their daughter married with Suresh who belonged to the highly reputed Maraar family. Arjun was unaware about the marriage plans of Janu, so he wrote letters to Janu which she received every week, Janu reads the letter from her beloved Arjun in an utter broken state. Meanwhile her parents were forcing her to get married were Vijimami states: "Have you thought about things? This is marriage we're talking about, not something to worry about."(63). as she was a teenage girl she was unable to decide her future, later being convinced by her parents she decides to sacrifice her love and gets ready for her marriage. Janu was been promised that she would get all kind of happiness, wealth and her desire to complete her higher education would be fulfilled by the Marrar family. Janu in order the bring pleasure to her parents gets married to Suresh, the marriage ceremony took place in Guruvayur Temple and her grandparents offered sugar equivalent to the weight of Janu as a Tulambaram, the offering was made to lord Guruvayur Appan.

The dominant society never permits women to educate, the same is with the case of Janu were her parents rejects her desire to pursue her higher education and forces her to marry the men of the wealthy family. This situation is more elaborately evaluated by Mary Wollstone Craft where she states that: " women are told from their infancy, and thought by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, Justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives."(30).

Janu is made to believe that marriage is a goal which a women need to attain, marriage makes her complete as a wife and mother, she must abide by the customs of the new family in which she is getting married. Indian girls before getting married are told to be like historical heroine as Sita, Draupadi, Savitri and Kannagi who were devoted to their husbands in every aspects of their life even at

the time of hardship and crisis and that husband are equal to god and the wife must serve them to bring upliftment in their husbands life. But the parents fail to teach their Sons to be like Historical hero's like Shiva, Rama and Adam who were devoted to their wife. The Traditional concept of being ideal husband and wife can't be fulfilled in today's modern era were both men and women are educated and receive equal opportunities and they are being thought to gain their own identity. Also there is an drastic change in the upbringing of a girl child were they are no more ready to be dominated by others both traditional and modern ideologies can be accepted till the self respect of an individual is not been kindled.

The protagonist feels difficult to adjust herself in the new surrounding, because as promised by her parents she was not given any kind of pleasure from the Maraar family, instead situation were worsen and she felt alienated. As she was brought up in the modern Delhi life she was unable to cope with the traditional Maraar family. Janu's stammering use of Malayalam words and her fluency in English and Hindi and the way she draped her saree, arranged and washed clothes and her speedy walk was always mocked by her in laws. Janu's husband seemed to be an escapist were he rarely stays at home and goes for business trip, even in holidays he would have conversation with his father were both would discuss about their business progress. Janu felt that: " it was getting clearer that it was the Maraars I had married, not Suresh."(87). Suresh never cares and considers Janu he rarely spends time with her and only makes use of her in-order to satisfy his sexual desires.

Janu's parents were always ill-treated in their visit to Maraar family, the Maraar insulted them by showing their superiority and wealth, her parents unable to bear the abuse stopped visiting Janu. The condition was more worsen after the death of Janu's father as her mother was a widow she was been totally disrespected and was been viewed as an outcast, she was been treated as servant. Even in this modernized era, still widows are been recognized as unwelcomed guest in functions and auspicious days. Thus Misra describes the condition of the women and the way on how they are suppressed and viewed. Misra exhibits that such a cruel attitude towards women can be changed, only by developing the attitude of questioning against the injustice injustice state.

Janu though tries to adjust the circumstances she is unable to satisfy the Maraar needs, she thought that if she gets pregnant and bear a child then everything might change in her life and would receive back all the lost love and concern from her in-laws and husbands. Where Pathak rightly states: "The importance of woman has been recognized in literature on various grounds. But she has rarely been defined as a subject in her own right. For centuries, the experience has been synonymous with the masculine experience"(91). Because Janu thought that though they are indifferent to her, a grandchild would change them because they are considered as the next heir of the families. In order to gain recognition Janu bears a child and gives birth to a beautiful girl child, but the Maraar family were totally upset, because they were expecting for a boy child, even Suresh was away for a business trip and visited only days after the birth of his daughter. However Janu was happy because she felt that her child was a blessing for her and would bring back all her lost happiness. But things were totally upside down the condition was more worsen after the birth of Riya because Riya was unusual than

a normal child with learning disability. The whole family along with Suresh viewed Riya as an uninvited member of their Maraar, Janu goes to the utmost state of heart broken and despair that neither she was recognized nor her daughter. The cruel behaviour of the family was that, they neglected Riya in family functions and gatherings thinking that Riya would spoil their reputations for being born as disabled.

Even life played a cruel game in innocent Riya's life she haven't received any love care and concern expect from her mother, at the age of three Riya was been removed from the school for her learning disability and she was been changed to a Special School. After Riya's birth Suresh to reflected as a careless father isolated himself and escapes for a trip by neglecting Riya, he continuously goes for a trip from Trivandram to Bombay, there he lives a luxurious and comfortable life with his business partners. Suresh never tried to reconcile their unhappy marital state, he was a quite indifferent personality living in his own world of business. Suresh was only physically attracted to Janu were their souls were separated though they lived a united year of marital life. Janu's life was filled with utmost state of distress thinking about Riya's condition, once she read in a newspaper magazine that physically challenged child when studied in a normal school had a great positive impact on their mental health and Country like U.K and America were encouraging such children to join normal schools to be benefited to improve their health condition. So Janu decided to take Riya abroad for her health development and she qualified with a post graduate diploma in special education, to take care of her child with special needs.

Janu communicated to the British Council and USIS in Delhi, to get admission on Arizona State University and as a result a letter arrived from the University accepting Janu's M.A., degree on special education. Though Janu was passive and patient in almost all the sufferings she faced, but when it comes to her daughter she fought bravely and as a devoted mother she wants to give her daughter education, happiness, lost love, and success. The love of Janu towards her daughter can be compared with Taylor the major protagonist of the work *Pigs in Heaven*, where she states: "I'm sorry, I can't understand you. Turtle is my daughter. If you walked in here and asked me to cut off my hand for a good cause, I might think about it. But you don't get Turtle"(76). Janu decides to go abroad along with her daughter as a step process before it she goes to Delhi to attend an Interview, after successfully attending the interview she goes to meet her childhood friend Leena. There she unexpectedly meets Arjun her teenage lover and they both felt the past emotion and a deep-rooted love emerging again. Janu had never lead a happy marital life, so she felt that she can't continue her life with Suresh. Her Heart and soul was still yearning for Arjun, so she decides to get divorce from Suresh by exposing her past love life.

Janu after her return to Kerala opens up her idea of getting divorce with Suresh they both had a conversation where Suresh tried to compromise Janu but she was holding strong in her decision and revealed him about the love affair with Arjun. Janu further said that she was totally upset by her marital life and lived a disastrous life all the past years, she was made fragile mentally, also was humiliated and insulted by her in-laws. The loveless life in Maraar made her feel the depressed state of anguish, Janu further felt that though Suresh was a great

son to his parents but as a husband and father he ranks last, thus years of isolation finally gave strength to Janu to fight back the injustice faced by her and gained the lost identity to her and her beloved daughter Riya.

The Maraar had never experienced such insult before as they belong to a socially reputed and wealthy family they felt that if a women leaves their son it would bring shame to their family. So the family members decided a plot against Janu and admitted her in Asylum saying that she was psychologically affected even the psychiatrist supported and made everyone believed that Janu was lacking her mental strength. To some extend even Janu's mother and grandmother believed that she was been effected, also Janu was cruelly executed in order to cure the illness. As the result of this she was separated by her beloved daughter Riya, months passed by later Janu's mother felt that her daughter was normal and it was the cruel conspire against her to frame her as mad and that there is no further need for medication, however she fought with Maraar and got back her daughter to their home.

Janu steadily grows up her strength and visits abroad to continue her Masters on Special Education at the Arizona University also in weekends she meets Arjun and the past passion emerges among them. Meanwhile Janu felt that her life and world was incomplete without her daughter so she comes back and fights for her daughter's custody and files a divorce against Suresh. Janu's love towards her daughter can be compared with the motherly love of the major protagonist of the work *Virginia* were Ellen Glasgow writes: "her submission was the submission of a flower that bends in a strom"(116). As the result of this her daughter is returned back to her and also Suresh accepts for divorce and few months later he gets married to a rich girl who was equal to their status. Janu the courageous mother promises her daughter that no one is as significant as her and she would give her all happiness which she deserves and that god as gifted her, this special life in order to serve her daughter. Also she says that even if Arjun rejects her as his daughter, then they can lead their own satisfied happy life in this world. Thus motherhood is a boon to Janu and gave her the extreme firmness to fight back her isolated state and brought back her with dignified identity.

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