

## Journey of Self : A Study in Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises*

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**Abstract.** Though woman empowerment has been flourished worldwide and educating girl child is made mandatory by many governments to bring change in the image of woman in the society; still, literacy cannot immaculate the polluted mentality of a person in a patriarchal hegemony to great extent, but can pave their way to overcome the hindrance and lessen their sufferings through self-discovery. In the male dominating society, a woman has to be determined and should possess strong self-belief to withstand the hedge generated through the rustic conception of the people around her. To render support to the above thought, Jaishree Misra wrote her debut novel *Ancient Promises* harnessing a fresh concept of 'new woman', filled with the courage to confront against the social interdiction and disbelief. Her novels consist of real life characters articulating the present scenario of woman struggle, her agony and sufferings. This paper attempts to explore the journey of a woman from restriction to liberty, subjugation to supremacy and boredom to self-discovery through modern perspective.

**Keywords :** Liberty; patriarchal society; self-discovery; interdiction; subjugation; suffering.

Jaishree Misra, a prominent Indian writer, was born in 1961 to a Malayalam family in New Delhi. She is the great niece of late Thakazhishasankara Pillai, a renowned Malayalam writer. Besides being a distinguished writer, she utilized part of her life serving in the field of social service and also worked as a film classifier in British Board Film Classification. With her debut novel *Ancient Promises*, published in 2000, she announced her presence in the world of literature, begetting worldwide fame to her. Continuing her literary journey she brought other novels like *Rani*, *Afterwards*, *A Scandalous Secret*, *Accidents like Love and Marriage* et al. Her writing spun around the theme of feminism buffed with modern aspect.

The novel *Ancient Promises* centered around Janaki or Janu, as the protagonist, who is not only portrayed as the mirror of the prevailing

image of a woman in the autocratic hegemony but is also impersonated as the face of a new woman who withstands every suffering in her life through her determined attitude. It consists of the glimpse of narrator's live experiences denoting it as semi- autobiographical novel of Jaishree Misra. In this work of fiction, Janu witnessed to revolve around the theme of marriage, motherhood and self-desire and seem to be surrounded with many predicaments which are gracefully budged by her. In the patriarchal setup, a woman's life is full of thorny challenges. As per them a woman should always depend on the male part to lead her life and if she dares to set her own way to live, she has to face the evil outcomes. This situation can be analyzed through the words of Marie Mies :

The career woman has not only to face the opposition of her surroundings and to struggle against many objective obstacles, But she is often divided in herself because she also often subscribes to the Indian idea of womanhood. Her problems arise, firstly from the contradictions between this image and the demand of a new social situation and then from the discrepancy between new aspirations and lack of opportunity.

(Mies, 130)

The protagonist Janu was born in Delhi. She belongs to the kind of family who lives in Delhi but is deeply rooted in Kerala. Their livelihood was dipped into their native staunch culture and tradition. Thus, Janu's parent sent her to a Convent school for better studies as they believe; good education can attract rich and fortunate families. Also, her walls of restriction were confined between her parents orthodoxy. They inserted in their daughter's mind that, "the reputation of families was carried on the shoulders of their daughters" (46-47).

Janu was overcharged with a list of conservative mindset right from her beginning. Her mother moulded her daughter according to the societal bourgeois. But love knows no boundaries. During her school days she fall in love with her classmate Arjun, whose few days company weakens her parent several years' lessons. For her, the period spent with her beloved was the happiest moment of her life, but soon the beautiful days turned into scary nights when her parents were aware about her

daughter's disloyalty, and she was forced into marriage to a well-recognized Maraar family son Suresh Maraar at a very early age of 18. Janu was taught that a woman is believed as an incarnate of sacrifices and thus she had to suppress her love inside her heart and had to move to a new world far away from her family and her birthplace.

Compressing her past, she entered the house of Maraars with a hope to be a part of her new family and a dream to create many beautiful memories with them. But to her surprise things turned to the opposite. Her husband for whose sake she abandoned her parent, turned out to be living as a single soul and seemed to drown in his business, making international tours and meetings to flourish it. While her mother-in-law and other family members never welcomed her to be their part. Janu was disheartened with the coldness of her husband and other members but she never stopped trying and interpolate many initiatives to bring them closer. Even her strive to make place in their heart by having their grandchild turned fruitless. Their ignorance towards their own blood was something out of Janu understanding. With the foundation of new life, problems did not stop rather things went more vulnerable with the report of her daughter's mental disorder. The news spun around Janu making her broken heart and hopeless. But her ability to endure helped to regain her self-identity and made her realize that in that alien house someone had joined her to whom she can call as her part. The realization gave her strength to stand against the predicaments coming forth for her happiness. In search for her child an ordinary livelihood Janu reached Sheela kurioskore's school from where she paved her way towards salvation. She speaks:

We learnt first of all life offered no miracles. Everything had to be taught, learnt and absorbed of a painfully slow pace, with patience and fortitude on the part of both the teacher and the taught.

(109).

She started teaching disabled children generating new opportunity to learn about special education course from abroad and informed about the scholarship provided by the government to study. She made a plan to escape the Maraar's world and set new beginning with her daughter. In the patriarchal setup a woman is never let to make independent decision, she has to weigh the invisible burden of restrictions

and responsibilities in her speech and action. If someone dared to challenge the norms of the society, she has to suffer and so Janu had to do. Janu manages to visit Delhi for scholarship interview, where she met Arjun. Confronting their feelings to each other, Janu becomes more determined to stick to her decision. But Suresh was not going to grant her freedom so easily and thus she has to face the evil part of her husband. He tried to disable her plan and determination by making her mentally ill. She underwent painful diagnosis which was not meant to heal her rather set to break her and resist her from escaping Maraars.

Determination cannot be suppressed under the patriarchal desire and thus Janu manages to overcome every trap set forth in her way by the societal norms and the people around her. In the novel Janu is witnessed to play different roles in her life successfully. As a daughter, she tries to walk on the way set by her parents and obeys every decision imposed on her whether forgetting her love of her life or agree to marry a person totally strange to her. As a lover, she trusted her beloved blindly crossing every threshold. As a wife, she started her life with her husband suppressing her own desire and giving her best to become a good partner. As a daughter-in-law, she made multiple efforts to make place in her in-laws' heart though she fails every time. As a mother, she plays the most significant role, taking stand for her daughter for every injustice came in her way that eventually leads to Janu's self-realization.

In the end of the novel, the narrator illustrated Janu's victory leaving a good lesson for her in-laws. The novel consists of arrays of sufferings in the life of woman in her journey to self-discovery, providing a lesson to the readers about the power of strong determination and self-belief, if rooted deep within one's conscience can uproot any interdiction coming in the way, even holding the last hope of their life because success comes to those who dares. As seen in the novel, Janu's friend Leela and her mother come out to be the straw of her life. Through their help, Janu manages to resist from being drowned in the huge ocean of patriarchal mess.

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