



IMPOSING PATRIARCHY; TAKING OWNERSHIP FOR ONE'S OWN LIFE IN JAISHREE MISRA'S ANCIENT PROMISES

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Abstract:

Equal rights and opportunities for all genders should be available in every aspect of life, such as education, identity, respect etc. Women are now performing equally well as men in every profession and proving their strength physically and mentally in various activities and being recognised on a global scale. The journey of female to achieve this position is not easily achieved especially from a male dominated society. They have come across lots of hurdles. To secure women's rights in a patriarchal culture, many social reformers and freedom fighters put their hands together to achieve this, especially writers, gave their full support through their writings. Women are neither better than nor inferior to males; each person has their own rights to live. The article based on the novel Ancient Promises; focuses on the characteristics, requirements, challenges, and concerns of motherhood.

Indian women writers have given the country's literature a new emphasis. They have left an enduring imprint on the world of English literature by shifting the focus away from the long-standing dominance of men over them. Jaishree Misra is one among contemporary female writers who was born in 1961 to a Malayalam family who lives in United Kingdom. Misra published her first book Ancient Promises (2000).

In the novel Ancient Promises, the author beautifully narrates the life journey of Janaki (Janu). Throughout the novel author spots light on the situations the protagonist faces and how she handle it and overcomes all struggles and achieves the life which she dreamed to live. The author has recognised following and preserving our traditions for future generations is important, but understanding, happiness, self respect is also most important for a woman. Through the character Janu, Misra describes every circumstance a women going through



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

before and after marriage in a great detail throughout the entire novel. At the age of 18, Janu was forced into an arranged marriage, which was not the life she had envisioned. She develops feelings for Arjun, a cricket-loving student who attends the school next door. The opening line of the book is "My marriage ended today." The novel's opening and closing scenes take place in a courtroom.

Keywords: Teenage love, disappointments, patriarchy, psychological stress, reunion

Introduction

Janu lives in Delhi with her Malayali parents and Delhi friends. She is studying in Irish convent school with the idea of her parents she should speak good English. During her busy and cheerful school days, through her close friend Leena, she meets Arjun, a student at the nearby boy's school. During the first meeting itself, she was drawn to Arjun, because they shared similar interests, they continued to meet frequently outside of school and eventually became friends. Even though Janu does not particularly enjoy cricket, she often travels with Arjun because of his passion of the game. Janu is not able to clearly figure out the feeling between both them; she feels the caring and emotional attachments towards him are none other than love. For the first time, she asked her mother to let her friends join for lunch so she could take Arjun home. Whenever Janu becomes so mad about Arjun her parent's warnings alarmed, but the pleasure of teenage feeling does not restrict her meeting Arjun. When her annual vacation began, Janu told Arjun that she would be travelling to Kerala, where both of her grandparents reside and where she had spent her childhood holidays with them and enjoys the nativity of Kerala. During her holiday visit matchmaking was introduced at this time by her grandmother (Ammuma). Although Janu's mother isn't overly excited about it because she thinks Janu should enroll in college the next year and she is only 17 years old. Janu isn't aware that this will be her last trip to Kerala as their daughter.

When Janu returns to Delhi, Kerala's calm rhythms were swiftly replaced by the hectic metropolis lifestyle. Final year school exam fear and next year college admission was roaming around in students' mind, but the love between Janu and Arjun flourished without caring about anything around them. Arjun and Janu began to meet up more frequently outside of the school. Freaking teenage roaming was no longer they both were caught red-handed by



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

Janu father's friend informed to him and Janu had been nicely canned by her father. Since then, Janu has been picked up and left off at school, and she is not even allowed to use the phone. Going outside with friends also absolutely prohibited. But the lovers shared their conversation through their friends. After exam Janu's parents lost interest of sending Janu to college and Janu was taken to Kerala for her annual trip and in the meantime Arjun got placement in Hull University where he is going to be accompanied with his mother in England. Arjun is little excited that his future life is going to happen in England and he is busy with getting Visa and organizing for his departure, however poor Janu is unable to take pleasure in it and could not bear the feeling of missing him. Before Arjun leave India Janu informed her mom that she is going to meet Leena before she leave to her hometown. By looking Janu's unhappy face her mother allowed Janu to go to meet Leena. Arjun and Janu both happen to meet in Leena's house. Before sending Janu home Arjun promised "I will be back soon."

Janu was informed several days before they start to Kerala that Maraar family who are highly respected at their hometown was interest on Janu for their younger son. Mrs. Maraar feels a wealthy might turn out to be arrogant and unable to adjust and they heard about Janu family who were conservative and traditional and the match-making is going on. Janu prefers to put off the marriage proposal by talking about her future studies rather than inform them about Arjun, but her parents insisted there was no need to worry about her studies because bridegroom's family had promised to make necessary arrangements for Janu to continue her higher education even after the marriage. In the meantime, Janu received a letter from Arjun in which he simply wrote, "I miss you very much," added that he had three years to finish his course, and advised her to keep herself occupied. But before she gets the next letter from Arjun it was like they are about start to Kerala to finalize the Maraar family proposal which is well do family with good respect in Kerala. As soon as they reached Kerala the arrival of Maraar family came to meet Janu. It seems they are very much interested in this proposal and Suresh the bridegroom wants to talk to Janu for a while before they finalize for marriage. Everyone is now eagerly waiting for Janu's response, and she was given just one night to make a decision about her next stage of life. Arjun's departure for three years and he went to



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

the different country which is totally having different style and culture. She is in confuse state of mind that whether Arjun will come back or not. Janu is not sure of whether she can wait for him or not and does not having the courage to hurt her parents who is living for her good life since her birth. She just packed the love for Arjun because of her parent's pressure and just accepted their decision blindly and said yes for the marriage. Janu wrote a final letter to Arjun by explaining her situation that she is going to get married in two weeks. Further she mention that she remembers Arjun only excited about going to UK from there she started to lose him and his excitement and new possibilities made her aloof from him. She further explains she accept the blind kind of trust towards her parents that all these days they done their best for her and now also they will choose only the best for her and I do not want to hurt them. Janu wished Arjun for his future and informed him not to reach her in future through any kind of communication. She just folded her love and feeling towards Arjun into an envelope. From there, the marriage ceremony started with huge crowd of relatives. Still Janu is not clear whether what she doing is right or wrong. In between, she just expresses her confusion to her mother, but she advised her to get rid of all old memories and begin a new life.

Her wedding day was similarly scheduled on her eighteenth birthday in Guruvayur Temple at eleven o'clock, the most auspicious hour of the day, and was held in a wonderful way with the blessings of family members and nonstop rain. After the marriage, Janu is moving to her new house at Valapdu with lots of expectation and fear. Janu knows only little Malayalam, but there they are speaking Malayalam in fast, fluent, and elegant. Though, she loved a sweet person at the age of sixteen, but she now wants to live a kind and compassionate life in order to win their hearts at her in-laws' house. From the first day, Janu tried to mingle with everyone in her mother in law's house, but no one showed interest to take her as a part of their family except children and animals, everyone at Maraar family silently observing every movements of Janu's behavior. Even though eating is prioritised for men and children before women, she was a little taken aback by this. As per her mother advices, she remains shy and communicates very less as it is expected to be good thing from a daughter-in-law, which is a pathetic thing in India. Because of detachment at her mother in low house, Janu became



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

suddenly home-sick and about to burst into tears. Suresh Janu's husband as a son of Maraar does not want to spend much time alone with her. Maraar family having too many things a daughter in law should follow to become their favorite. For many months she tried her most to make it up to become her mother-in-law choice number one, but had failed in that too. But they allowed Janu to continue her studies. Lot of things were changed Janu from Delhi to Janu as a daughter-in-law of Maraar family. In between, the sweet and painful memory of Arjun and Leena solaced her. She often believes that if Arjun were in England, he would have forgotten about me and instead chosen a more attractive girlfriend.

One year had passed, nothing has not stop Janu to become one among in the Maraar family. Every time each one of them teases Janu for her broken Malayalam language, the way she wear her sari and even for small things she does, but Janu never shared these situation to her parents because she know that it will deeply hurt them. Instead of completing BA and getting job, Janu decided to become a mother of a child will change the current situation and elevated to the position of Good Mother and Good Daughter-in-Law. Soon after Janu revealed that she is pregnant to her husband, Suresh is confused and said his ammaand his sister will take care about that. During that time, Janu expected Suresh may speeds more time along with her rather than going to a business trip, but again with disappointment. But Janu is happy that during pregnancy Indian girls use to go to their parent's house for delivery. When she reached Delhi, she is once again happy to be with her parents for few months and whenever she happens to see some places Arjun and Janu went together it arouse the memory of Arjun more. During the midnight of Christmas Eve, Riya was born she receives a warm welcome from her mother and grandparents with the hope of who is going to transform Janu's life into a happy life in future. Suresh came to see the baby with a jewel expected a boy baby by his parents. When some of her old friends came to met her and Leena came to see her baby, the meeting is like two stranger meeting together, the attachment they both had together before all gone. After returning to Kerala with Riya, there is no much enthusiasm to welcome both Janu and Riya as expected, but Janu started to enjoy her all days with Riya by taking care of alone. After few months was passed a sudden call from Delhi with a message that Janu's father was died in his office of a sudden heart attack. His body was brought to Kerala that is



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

the place he loved so much. Janu's mom was returned to her mother in lawhome in Alleppey, where Janu's grandmoter and her mother started to live together.

There is an alarm from Suresh family that something is not good with Riya and her growth scale. Riya was taken to doctor to find out what is wrong with her. Finally, it was confirmed that "Riya is mentally handicapped" with all the features she has. Janu felt like the whole world is upside down with after hearing the word her child is mentally handicapped. A mother of little girl Riya was not able to accept it. She felt at least a new born may change her situation in her mother in law home and the attachment with Suresh will become better, but all expectation has gone through the window. But it was more hurting and strange to Janu that no one in Maraars family shed tears for Riya's problem, even Suresh. It was so clear and confirmed by the approach and behaviour of Maraars that Janu and her daughter Riya are not going to be Maraar's favorite forever. In between, her sister in laws marriage ceremony made Janu to be busy. Janu whipped out all her sobbing towards Riya's and her condition at her mother in law home and now decided to put Riya at special school, joined in school along with Riya as a teacher. Through Sheela in school she heard that getting qualification in Special Education will help her to take care of Riya in a better way and that education facility is only available in London, not in India and suggestion of taking Riya along with her during Janu's education will be wonderful for Riya and children's with disabilities were welcomed and valued in West. No awkward look on the special children.

Janu started to focus in that direction to do her progression with the British Council and the USIS in Delhi. The Maraars family members began to pay attention to Janu's progress toward travelling abroad. Janu came to know that to apply in Arizona State University, she should complete Masters from India. She applied for MA in English at Kerala University. Daily in the morning, Janu and Riya went to the school, once they return home Janu started to read her MA books. Suresh was a passing cloud throughout their hectic existence. Janu felt that this is the right time to inform Maraars family and to her mother that Janu and Riya are going alone to the University of Arizona to pursue her MA in Special Education and now she has been called for an interview at Delhi. Everybody in the family even Suresh was trying to stop her going to aboard, but Janu was very strong that she does not



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

want to miss this opportunity. Janu left Riya at her mother's home and started her train journey to Delhi. During the train journey all the bitterness was just running inside her mind and just to relax she had started conversation with the co-passenger. From the station, Raghu uncle accompanied Janu and took her to his home for a stay in Delhi. Next day along with ten others Janu is waiting at India International Center for the interview. At the end of the interview with lots of thrill, they asked Janu to wait till 5 pm at the center for result, but Janu decided not waste time there and decided to see her old friends. First she called Leena to check out whether she is at her home, positively she is at home and on the way she brought some new clothes for the new born with lots of excitement, but surprise and shock is waiting at Leena's house. Yes, Arjun came to meet Leena and her baby. Her longing favorite dream to meet Arjun came true. Janu felt that she was sitting inside the roller coaster after seeing Arjun, running of old memories and started her conversation about her family and Riya's disability. Discussion goes between three of them is like three old friends just finished their school. They just forgot whether they are talking about the current stories or old. Janu felt that it was like an unforgettable day in her life. She wants to hold this moment forever. After two hours, Janu left Leena's house with Arjun and he offered a lift in his car to reach Center. On the way, Arjun took Janu to his house where the situation made them to indulge together. Arjun is still carrying Janu's photo in his wallet that made Janu to be the happiest person in the world. Arjun insisted Janu not to leave Delhi and asked her to stay with him forever, but Janu is in a situation that she cannot accept his offer because she is a wife of another man and mother of a disabled girl child. Moreover in India legally it is impossible for a married woman to walk out from marriage life just like that. Arjun does not care about all these things. He does not want lose Janu again. He informed Janu to come along with him to study in London instead of going to Arizona and bring Riya along with her. Arjun showed his fear whether again he will lose her because of her family pressure. But now Janu is very strongly and said this time it might not happen I promise please wait till then. Arjun believed her and promised he will wait for Janu till she comes back to him and she can reach him anytime to start a new life. Janu felt that both of them missed a beautiful life in these past years. Janu rejoin with Arjun to the Indian International Center at 5pm to know the result. Mrs. Rustomji



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

read out Janu name along with two others. After hearing the result, a big smile on the face of Janu and Arjun because they got an opportunity to begin their new life in future. Janu is not ready to lose Arjun for anything.

Janu returned to Kerala with an offer letter for scholarship and the joy of meeting Arjun. Following Shobha aunty's phone conversation about Janu's scholarship result, Suresh was at the Cochin railway station and having a new respect in his eyes. From there, they both are going directly to Alleppey to see Riya. On the way, Janu started to talk about the interview and Suresh started to question in the context to prevent her going to aboard. At Alleppey, Janu stayed with her mother for few more days to slowly reveal that she is going to ask divorce from Suresh and going to start a new life with Arjun. For an Indian lady, ending her marriage life and beginning a new life with another man is not an easy task. One side an opportunity to live again with the lovable one and on the other side a woman of dishonest, heartless, liar, adultery all these words are waiting for her in the near future. Janu even think Riya has no other sibling, whose reputation I shall soon tarnish as a result of my choice with all these thought she spend sleepless nights there. After Janu's father death anniversary, she told her mother and grandmother about her plan to get divorce from Suresh before she leaves India and will live with Arjun. Janu's mother is not at all okay with Janu's decision. Suresh came to pickup Janu and Riya the next day to take them to his home. On the way, Janu said she wants to talk to Suresh and they stopped at a restaurant. Janu straight away asked to Suresh that she want a divorce from him. Suresh had a look of fake amazement on his face. As he spoke with Janu, his face showed signs of shock, hurt, horror, and grief one after the other. After much deliberation, Suresh realized that there was nothing he could do to stop Janu from making her choice. So, Suresh said he will give divorce.

Janu reached her mother-in-law house without revealing what was happened and the decision made between Janu and Suresh. Janu just leaves that matter to Suresh. Few days passed, without Janu's knowledge a well-planned play was conducted one day at Suresh's house to set up the idea that Janu was suffering from a mental illness. Everyone was led to believe that Janu had developed a mental illness by the Maraar family in an effort to stop Janu from moving to England and preserve their family honour. After observing Janu's struggles in the



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

hospital for number of days, Janu's mother took a decision that she would look after her daughter. After much concern and effort taken by Janu's mother she came out of all illusion. Once more, Suresh and his mother invited Janu to join them in a drama they were planning, but this time Janu's mother came to the conclusion that since Janu is so fussy about it, it would be best to grant divorce. Janu and her mother approached a lawyer to apply for her divorce, but that did not work as expected. Suresh appeared out of nowhere one day; asking for Riya and expressing his dislike for having another man raise his daughter. Despite Janu's request to not do so, he took Riya along with him. Janu has no clue where Riya is staying. She is sobbing in agony because she misses her a lot. Later she came to know Suresh has appointed a person to take care of Riya at home. Janu tried many ways to get Riya before she goes to England, but all attempts failed. Riya is the final weapon Suresh has at the moment. If Janu returns to Suresh, she can live with Riya; otherwise, it is not at all possible for her. But Janu and her mother are sure that Janu is not returning to Suresh once again even if it is for Riya.

The time has arrived, and Janu is at the airport with her mother and grandmother's blessings. She bid her homeland farewell while thinking of Riya. Arjun is waiting at the airport to welcome Janu. Arjun helped Janu on the process of University admission and her accommodation. Janu started to learn many things when she was at UK. Janu made new friends and began to hang out with Arjun on the weekends. Whenever she is calling her mother, Janu is curious to know about Riya and recently learned that she is well and happy with her father. After ten months, Janu will soon return to India to finalize the divorce and repatriate Riya to the UK as she had originally intended. It's time for Janu to say goodbye to Arjun, but she's not sure if she'll come back. Arjun comforts Janu as soon as she gets divorced, they will get married within a month. Once Janu reached India, she was welcomed by her mother and grandmother. The time has come for Janu to show up in court to obtain a divorce and reclaim her daughter Riya from Suresh. Everything happened as she had anticipated. Janu is really happy right now. Now with Riya and Arjun, she is going to begin her happy life forever.



PRANAV JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY

CONCLUSION:

Jaishree Misra's book *Ancient Promises* is semi-autobiographical. Misra sheds attention on the situations that the women are going through at her parents' home and mother-in-law's home. A woman also has the right to live a happy life, but freedom to live is abolished in the name of patriarchy. The protagonist of this novel made every effort to make all situations in a better way even though there is no concern about her or her daughter. She only expected love and caring people, but that was lacking there. The decision taken by Janu after meeting Arjun is only because of the inadequate responsibility of her husband Suresh who ignored to notice her expectations and no concern about their daughter. In the novel, the author tries to show that women are ready to accept whatever situation comes in front of her even if it is not the way she wants it, but cornering her to the core makes her set herself free from the situation. Through the Janu character, the author shows that women should take the ownership of their lives.

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