

# From Turmoil to Tranquillity: Trauma, Healing, and Transformation in Jaishree Misra's Ancient Promises

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## Abstract

*The Resistance of the women protagonists against the unjust patriarchal restrictions signals that they cannot tolerate undue male supremacy. They do not lose their mental balance because of frustration. Instead, they empower themselves boldly to lead their lives free from physical, emotional and sexual domination and exploitation. The narrative fabric of Jaishree Misra explores the deep desire of women to become liberated and empowered like their male counter parts besides enjoying equal rights on par with men. Since women had been considered as ignorant and inferior, they had been forced to be dependents. Moreover, they were made to believe that men were their care takers and masters. Hence, women did not cross the boundaries laid by men. But, scientific and technological development and expansion of knowledge and reasoning awakened the women to understand how they had been systematically exploited by the male society. This awakening slowly initiated the women to assert their individuality and to become dignified. Janaki is a representation of the thousands of women who aspire for liberation. Janu, being a rarity, trespasses the society-drawn continues to shun the definite dogmas every emancipated woman would aspire for. Janu the way she expresses her identity has been revealed in multifaceted ways. She faces all obstacle, struggles and responsibilities with a fierce determination that has always been lurking beneath her mind. She can be undoubtedly coronate as the true amalgam of a liberated soul.*

**Keywords:** Resistance, Sexual Domination, Exploitation, Liberation

Ancient Promises is her debut and semi-autobiographical novel. The novel speaks about the story of young woman who always longing for love and dutiful daughter, a compassionate but guilty lover, a restless and miserable wife, a helpless and despairing mother-a- woman constantly in search of identity, a woman pursuing her rightful share of happiness. Janaki also known as Janu is a protagonist of the novel. Janu's life reflected to Misra's life. This autobiographical novel Janu faces the unhealthy customs and traditions which involves female subjugation and the pitiable voiceless condition of women in India.

Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* is an example of a woman, how she is treated in the Indian society. There have been significant changes in the roles of women in the post-independence era. Despite all this, she is still not completely liberated. Women are supposed to behave in a particular way according to certain rules and codes of conduct fashioned by society. In an ordinary Indian family the birth of a boy is preferred to that of a girl. He is considered an asset and she a liability. This is from where a system of patriarchy originates. The image of that so called Ideal woman is constructed by the society.

Misra specifies, how the institution of marriage becomes a burden and how being a hybrid individual can create conflicts in a patriarchal society. Janu survives the strong clutches of patriarchy and attains self-affirmation. Misra's story reiterates the significant of universal quest of women for self-actualization and self-expression. After the birth of the special child, she realizes herself. In this situation, she makes a transfiguration to Janu. Janu faces many struggles to continue her education. Meanwhile, Janu starts a special education for her child. At that time, Janu meets her past lover, Arjun. This meeting changes her life.

In *Ancient Promises*, Janaki alias Janu is a teen age girl. Her parents get her married to a man from Kerala. The marriage between two strangers counts nothing significant, because the couple is not happy about their marriage. Janu is forced to marry Suresh by her parents after they come to know about her love affair with Arjun. Janu keeps quiet as she cannot go against her parents and moreover her lover is in London pursuing his studies. It is the ego of her parents and also they do not want to allow their daughter to select her life partner. The parents' patriarchal attitude is very strong and they become so adamant and harsh to the daughter. They just want to satisfy the society that they fail to satisfy or fulfil their daughter's wish.

Janu has to be an obedient to her parents because she has been taught to obey her parents. And she is a girl belongs to weaker society she could not raise voice for her own well-being. Misra's *Ancient Promises* discusses how Indian parents fail to understand their children and also about the psychological trauma undergone by the teenage girl. It also portrays how marriage becomes a powerful weapon in the hands of men in controlling and suppressing women.

Both Janu's parents had left the most important decisions in their lives to be taken by their parents. They strongly believe that their parents understand what is best for them. This type of friends and experiences Janu has completely unknown to her parents. Janu says,

*My world is confusing one for them. They are so sure that I would be  
Safest among my own people, marrying eventually into my own  
Community. But I had all kinds of friends and all kinds of experiences  
That were alien and that couldn't be stopped. Arjun, unfortunately,  
Would fall firmly into that category-he was the wrong age. (Ancient Promises 26).*

Janu has to please her mother in law and other family members at Suresh's house. She has to education at her parents' house and she behaves well in manner with the other ladies of the big family. Janu's intelligence is misinterpreted as her arrogance to think that she disrespects the elderly women of the house. Janu is ignored by her in laws and they start passing comments over her descent behaviours. For Janu it is not much difficult to take up decisions on her own risk but she does not do anything against the elderly people. But the real problem she has to encounter is with Suresh her husband about whom she does not know anything except he is a business man. Suresh is another patriarchal representative who does not bother Janu and never considers her as a human being. Janu's humiliation is great that she feels discomfort in staying there with people who are not willing to get along with normal concerns. Janu's mind gets confused due to loneliness.

It is that of helpless Indian woman unable to help herself or her dignity, trapper in a subtle web woven by the culture, religion, and a relentless totalitarianism of moral principles. This shows that Janu has been denied the right to choose her own husband. Janu is not against, marriage, but argues only for equal rights and position for both the husband and wife. In this way the author shows that how woman has continued to be suppressed even in the post-independence era and emphasize she should find strength resisting against the patriarchal norms.

Janu laments about her marriage to the conventional family where women has no voice to express their views on anything. Janu could not understand the age old customs and cultural barriers for keeping her away from pursuing her dreams. She fails to get her in-laws care and questions her having a hybrid identity. She is never treated as one among them; she is always the 'other'. Maraar family treats her as an outsider because of her Delhi life and English education and they never let her to be a part of the family. "Look you're not in Delhi anymore. Like it or not, you now live in Kerala, so I suggest you drop all these fashionable pleases and thank yours. Here we don't believe in unnecessary style" (AP 86).

Women are separated from their family after marriage and placed to the place about which they know nothing. Janu also has to follow different customs and practices in her mother's-in-law house. Janu is ignored socially in the house but physically harassed and exploited by her husband. Janu feels obviously that she is insulted by her husband and other family members.

Janu's longing for love and respect row and she finally realizes that her child will boo o to her awkward situation. She strongly believes that her new born baby will be her companion and she will throw away her loneliness. But Janu is disappointed when her baby is born with baby-syndrome. Janu is fetter and feels sorry for the worst situation. As a woman she thinks of her Arjun and believes that Arjun would have loved her and supported her if she has got married with him. Women are hindered from turning over a new leaf in the life because the priority is given to safeguard the tradition, culture and social status, not to the women and so their expectations and dreams are forced to sacrifice. Their education, career, parental home and their individuality are thrown away through the institution of marriage. Misra's Ancient Promises a sensitive account of a young girl pains to finds her destination in life.

Janu's husband Suresh never tries to establish an intimate relationship with Janu and her effort to win her husband's attention becomes hopeless. Her girl baby becomes her full time attention. Janu realizes her condition in that place. She starts thinking of her child's future. One thing she understands very well that her girl baby also will be treated like how she has been treated so far in the family. Janu's self is awaken and her conscious tells her to go for her own choice of life with her baby. She recollects Suresh's words about his expected wife, 'She has to be pretty, she has to be young, so that she would adjust, she has to be able to speak English, so he could take her to Mumbai in the hoped expansion of is motel business, nothing else was too important (AP 96).

Janu calculates and foresees what would happen to her girl baby in that family. Her baby would be ignored and put in aloof status without any concern. Janu is too young to experience the odds of life. She consciously compares her husband with Arjun. She thinks of her parents who made her miserable and she thinks of her husband that he is not a understanding husband and also a father. She realizes if a man cannot understand a wife how he will be expected to take care of his little daughter who is mentally challenged.

Janu takes steps to prove her individuality. She gains courage from her own self and no one is there for her to help to work out her plans. The tender and passionate woman of rich family background turns herself to down to earth. She joins a course in Delhi to get a degree of occupational Therapy. This is the fire she has got to move to the next level to create her own world.

Henrik Ibsen, through the depiction of Nora, in his play *A Dolls House* gives his view of an independent woman. The social instructions and conventions restrict the personal identity and individual freedom. Nora's individuality and freedom are in the hands of masculine society. She, as a woman, a wife and a mother, is treated like a doll. Constantly, she is under the control of the patriarch. As a humanist, Ibsen raises his voice against the hegemony of men that marginalizes women. Nora is a woman who does not want to live in illusion. She values self fulfilment and independence rather than accepting the conventional and stereotypical feminine ideals of passivity and self-sacrifice.

Janu has able to create a new fresh life with the men of their own selection and for this they simply resist all difficulties and have feminist conscious of their secondary position and get transformation of their female identities at the end. They decide their life.

### **Conclusion**

Misra portrays her women with the postcolonial idea of resistance in order to alter their image from labelled status. The women of Misra have resistance against their exploitations that they do not want to give up hope for the better life in future. These women do not expect luxurious life but they want to be respected. As women of positive attitude they are able to envision a great future. They learn to resist all difficulties in their life.

Janu determine to alter or change and reconstruct her life with the men of her choice. Janu is hopeful because they start realizing their present position that is called feminist consciousness or feminist awareness. This feminist consciousness brings a gradual assertiveness in their minds. There is a ray of hope emerges and spreads their confidence in life.

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