

ASPECTS OF POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM WITH REFERENCE TO JASISHREE MISRA'S ANCIENT PROMISES

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Abstract

Patriarchy is a system created with and historical background in which men hold primary power both in the family and public domain. This system paves way to women's oppression and subjugation. In the family the father figure holds authority over women, girl children and powerless men. Within this patriarchal setup women have been restricted with certain exclusive norms and conditions. Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* explores the cultural and psychological impacts of postcolonial concerns in literature written in English in India. She voices out for woman's reclaiming basic identities and acknowledgements from the society where she lives in. Her protagonist in *Ancient Promises* resists cultural and traditional overtones and goes through the trauma of displacement and power structures. Janu the female protagonist in the novel blends with two cultures and creates a new a complex postcolonial identity. Through the theme and the perfect art of characterization she extra-ordinarily gives her voice to the subaltern-the marginalized women underestimated by primordial norms of patriarchy.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchy, postcolonial identity, Resistance, Feminist Consciousness, Crossing Boundaries, Fighting for Emancipation.

INTRODUCTION

Jaishree Misra(1961) is considered to be one of the powerful Indian women writers in English. She has written eleven internationally acclaimed novels in English. She focuses on women's issues in Indian society in her fictional writings. Jaishree Mishra is a committed writer who breaks conventional stereotypes of Indian women through her protagonists of her novels. She portrays her women with both vulnerability and courage. Her female protagonists are educated and determined in empowering their position in the patriarchal society where they have to live in. She has dealt with post-colonial feministic approaches such as, gender discrimination, women subjugation and search for identity.

To her credit other than the novels she has published a memoir, *A House for Mr.Mishra*. She is the editor of *Of Mothers and Others: Stories, Essays, Poems* (2013), a collection of writing about motherhood. Chronologically her fourth novel *Rani* is a historical fiction based on the life of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi.

The famous French critic Helen Cixous writes in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* " Women must write herself: must write about women and bring women into writing...Women must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history- by her own movement." (Cixous 291) .In the twentieth century the Psycho Analyst Freud was accepted all over the world that the features of male dominance and male orientation in literature. He argues that the entire world is only with the view of man that there is only one gender, which is male in the world. Frued says, "Little girls are only little men".

It is quite common that the men writers prioritize themselves in their writing. The male writers discussed women's issues, they portrayed women as sufferer, having no potentials, a silent listeners with no due respect. It is done from a man's point of view. They never made attempt to listen to the women's physical pain, mental agony, emotional distress and psychological disturbances that they face in their routine. A woman who intends to fight for the liberation and empowerment of women is strongly criticized by men. In this situation many, women writers from India rise and give voice for women and for their interest. Writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandeya, Bharati Mugaree and Jaishree Misra jumped into the ocean of fiction to show how women folk can free themselves from being oppressed and suppressed by men for their advantage. The wake of feminism has triggered a new consciousness in women writers around the world and they begin to articulate their voice to break the literary and social norms of the past in order to change their status in the society.

The main ideas discussed in this paper include the history of women's position down the ages in India, the perspectives of Manu about women, the origin of patriarchy and its development, and the systematic oppression of women in the name of custom and tradition. Moreover, the novels of Jaishree Misra are analyzed to bring out her view about the aspects of postcolonial feminism. Before examining the novels of Jaishree Misra, it is essential to know how women have been subjugated by men for centuries. In the ancient period, women have been treated with honor and dignity. Indeed in families women have been respected and provided space in family administration and they have collaborated with men in making decisions. They have rendered their contributions in all spheres and have played equal role with men including politics. When the Aryans intruded into India 4000 years ago, they had brought in their holy text Manusmṛiti or Manava Dharmasastra along with, an ancient legal and moral text for them. The so called intruders traditionally believed that the book served as a basic legal and societal framework in ancient India. This book is referred to as The Laws of Manu, it is attributed to Manu, a revered figure in Hindu tradition who is considered the first human and the son of Brahma the creator God.

The laws of Manu a social and legal code where women are fixed in under lifelong male guardianship, expected to fulfill strict domestic duties and taught to revere their husbands as Gods. This patriarchal structure has undisputed power over the women sparing not girl children in the family, and they are the victims who have a political act of oppression by the powerful male members of the society. Manu has drawn norms for women exclusively that, "In childhood a woman must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her lord is dead, to her sons" (Ch.9. Verse 3). At once, there have been sudden changes in the women's world that certain women writers have written novels with the themes of postcolonial concerns like identity, representation, Othering, reclaiming voices, hybridity, resistance, female consciousness, independence and so on. At the arrival of the sensational feminism which demands voting rights, property rights and equality in education with men.

The women writers in India started focusing not only on women's issues but on the solutions for those issues through their depiction the heroines of their fictional writing. The most of their novels have been depicted with the women's psychological, sociological and political oppressions. The protagonists are most probably homemakers and uneducated women in certain cases even the educated women are portrayed as the victims of patriarchal strictures. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination.

Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* is a novel about an Indian girl Janaki's (Janu) painful life story raised in Delhi. She falls in love with Arjun, a school cricket star. Unfortunately she has to give up Arjun to enter an arranged marriage it has happened due to the pressure of her family in the name of social norms existing in the society. The marriage with Suresh does not give her any happiness instead struggle. Suresh her husband belongs to the tradition bound maraara family in Kerala and her in-laws have expected Janu to be polite with native behaviors. But Janu has been brought up in the cosmopolitan city could not avoid English at normal conversation with the family members. Janu is misunderstood to be an arrogant and stylish woman from city to a village in Kerala. Indeed Janu is simple and educated who knows about the consequences if she refuses to obey her parent's choice of her life partner regarding her marriage. Obviously as a young bride, she is not fully accepted by her husband, often she has to spend her time all alone except at times Suresh wants his physical needs to be fulfilled. Thus Janu feels ignored by her indifferent husband and cold rigid in-laws.

Janu's mental agony increases, and in due course, she realizes that she has been existing under the threat of primitive and conservative patriarchal rules prescribed only for women. In the first level as a daughter she has to hold up the tradition of obeying her parents. It's actually the first challenge with which she is badly encountered. In the second level as a wife and daughter-in-law she has to face challenges with the same manmade social boundaries with which she is devoured. Janu is able to somehow resist the suppressions imposed on her until she begets her daughter who is diagnosed as mentally handicapped. It is her third level as a mother, she does not want to be a victim of patriarchal believes that she has given birth to a premature female baby and that also with mental inability, as the family reacts with prejudiced and coldness towards the baby's condition deepening Janu's misery and isolation. She is still more badly cheated by the maraara family members, at this junction Janu wants to prove that she is a perfect mother to her daughter. She does not want to fail as a mother as she played her roles as 'daughter, wife, and daughter-in-law'.

Janu grows her inner strength in order to give a proper education to Riya. She makes use of her contacts from the side of Riya's school she comes to know about special education for disabled children. So in the third phase of her life she challenges the social boundaries which will not give better life and education for her daughter. Janu chooses to break her silence and her tie up with maraara family to seek the special education and a job for her future. She fortunately meets Arjun in Delhi. He appears to be single, and is settled in London. Janu opens up with Arjun all about her married life. Arjun understands her requirement for her study abroad programme. He does all paper work including scholarship from the university from London where she is to join special education course. Janu valiantly moves towards the destination where she and her daughter can live peacefully.

Since creation, feel of motherhood or mothering is dynamic expression that cannot be explained in words. It is in every woman's lives a transition filled with deep joy and profound hope; it also brings her intense physical, emotional and social hurdles. Janu in the novel plays the role as a mother of a disabled girl child undergoes emotional disturbances and social hurdles. She has to face overwhelming stresses from the members of Maraar Family. Jaishree Misra exposes the issues of the woman in the *Ancient Promises* in the three-layered pattern each layer over lapsed the other. She has designed the theme of the novel in such a way how a woman could play the three main roles in her life time. The protagonist maintained the values of tradition and culture. Janu the protagonist is the representative of the women who lead their life among the rules and regulations of the patriarchal framework.

Jaishree Misra has concern over the woman like Janu and she prescribes solutions for their issues through which they are able to find their emancipation. The postcolonial concerns have been applied by the writer as she wants to keep her protagonist as a woman who succeeds in her efforts through all types of struggles and obstacles. Janu is portrayed with certain postcolonial concerns like self-identity, resistance, female consciousness and independence. Janu is achieving her identity as a free and independent woman at the end of the story. To achieve her selfhood she resists all her short comings being a daughter, wife, and daughter in law. Eventually she realizes her role as a mother that she should compete the challenges of a restrictions of the society and move forward to the destination of freedom. At the next level she fixes herself up with the goal, to be an independent. She gets divorced legally from her husband and gets back her child. Janu feels in the court room, Misra says, "I was nervous and apprehensive and there was a pain in my stomach at the thought of seeing Riya again. Would she have grown? Would she shrink away from me? How long would it take for us to become mother and daughter again?" (AP 300). Janu is a character designed by Jaishree Misra is capable of having the postcolonial concerns like self-identity, resistance, female consciousness, independence and so on.

It is obvious that, the manmade society always consider woman as an inferior to man. Her functioning in family and society is limited to childbearing and child-rearing besides doing domestic chores. She has to take care of the health and comfort of the men-folk. She is expected to reflect patriarchal attitudes. She should be tradition-bound and should be shadows of their male partner. The man will be the deciding authority in the family as well as in the society. A woman has to morally upright and follows the virtue of chastity. Her sexuality is also controlled by man.

Jaishree Misra's *Ancient promises* declare that woman empowerment is essential for the family and the society. Janu is replica of great woman, who are able to project themselves as victorious and create spaces for in the center by journeying through the wilderness of patriarchal setup. All successful women were not given of the postcolonial concerns but they were fed themselves with postcolonial concerns such as identity, resistance, self-consciousness to achieve a independence.

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