

A WOMAN'S JOURNEY: READING JAISHREE MISRA'S ANCIENT PROMISES

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ABSTRACT

Jaishree Misra is an Indian author well known and established for her novels that explores themes of family, love, social issues and also women's journey to empowerment. She is a modern novelist who is comparatively a new entry in the list of women writers of India. Most of her novels deal with woman's journey from a subjugated female to an emancipated woman, who gathers courage to break the existing and traditional boundaries and emerge empowered and self-confident, able to navigate life's journey bravely. The prime focus of Misra's oeuvre has been struggles of women. The present paper "A Woman's Journey: Reading Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* is a part of the research project: "*Reinventing Feminine Subjectivity : A Feminist Reading of Selected Fiction of Jaishree Misra, Anita Nair and Arundhati Roy*. Most of Misra's novels depict submissive and meek female characters like Janu in *Ancient Promises*, Maya in her novel *Afterwards* and Manikarnika (in her teenage) in *Rani* and Neha and Sonya in *A Scandalous Secret*. Initially, almost all these prime female characters of her novels are comfortable in their submissive role to the male characters of their lives - love, father or husband. But , gradually the bitter experiences of their lives embedded them to throw away the mantle of submissive role and have the skill of establishing their individuality and enhance their own self-worth and also gather courage to start their life afresh. This enables these females to break away from the stereotypical roles and emerge as 'new woman' who become adept in making decisions and prioritise their happiness. The present paper has taken up only one of the text namely *Ancient Promises* to show a woman's journey to empowerment and liberation. To establish woman's journey to liberation and emancipation, certain theoretical concepts of Feminist theory have been used and appropriated form. Feminism is one such theory that involves women emancipating themselves on their own terms from discrimination, injustice and inequalities based on gender. Feminist ideology or philosophy, broadly speaking addresses orthodox patriarchal practices and customs that bound within male- dominated society. The prime aim of feminist philosophy is to put an end to the subordination and injustice and violence against women by enabling them to at least come at par with their male counterparts and gain more control of their own lives.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminism, Women Empowerment, Female Subjectivity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jaishree Misra is a British - Indian author. She was born in 1961 in Kerala, India. She grew up in a traditional Malayali family and spent her childhood in various parts of India including Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Delhi. Misra's parents encouraged her love for reading and writing from an early age. She pursued her higher education in the UK, earning a degree in English

Literature from the University of Oxford. She later completed her Master's degree in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia.

Her writing career began with her debut novel, *Ancient Promises* (2000), which was semi-autobiographical and explored themes of woman's suffering in love, marriage and even domestic violence. The novel received critical acclaim and established Misra as a prominent writer and a literary voice in Indian Literature. Misra lives in the UK with her family. She is married and has two children. Despite her busy writing schedule, she is actively involved in various charitable organisations, including those that support women's empowerment and education. In 2003, she published *Accidents Like Love and Marriage*, the novel that delves into the complexities of love, relationships and family dynamics in modern India. *Afterwards* (2004) is a narrative of a woman's journey towards self-discovery and healing after a traumatic event. *Rani* (2007) is a historical fiction that tells the story of Rani Lakshmibai, portraying her as a strong and courageous woman who fought against the British. However, this novel also sparked controversy due to its fictionalised account of the Rani's life, particularly her romance with an Englishman, which led to the book being banned in the state of UP. *Secret and Lies* (2009), the novel explores the destructive power of secrets and lies within families and the importance to truth and honesty. The protagonist Nisha's journey is of self-discovery, as she navigates her cultural heritage and finds her place in the world. *Secrets and Sins* (2010), this novel was shortlisted for the prestigious Commonwealth Writers's prize. The story revolves around three sisters.... Rohini, Nalini and Kamini who are reunited after being apart for many years. As they come together, old secrets and lies begin to surface, threatening to destroy their relationships and their sense of identity. *A Scandalous Secret* (2011) too explores the complexities of love, family relationships and social scandal. The novel narrates the destructive power of secrets and the impact of social scandal on a traditional Indian family's reputation and relationships. *A Love Story for My Sister* (2015) highlights the bond between sisters, and the ways in which they support and empower each other. This novel marks her eighth book which continues her exploration of themes such as family, love and women's identity and subjectivity. *Of Mothers and Others* (2015) is an anthology edited by Jaishree Misra, which is a collection of stories about motherhood and relationships, featuring contribution from various Indian women writers. *A House for Mr. Misra* (2017) is about fifty-five years old Mr. Misra, who is retired from his job and he finds himself struggling to come to terms with the changes in his family and society. It is about midlife crisis.

Jaishree Misra being the niece of renowned Malayalam novelist, short story writer and Jnanpith award winner, late Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, has creative impulse running in her blood. Most of her fiction is woven around woman, family, relationships, conflict and finally reassertion of the self and identity. Any research on Jaishree Misra's work will invariably involve feminist ideology, philosophy and theory. In some of her novels, it is patriarchal set up that becomes a restricting force in women protagonist's life journey and experience. To understand Misra's oeuvre, it is imperative to understand some concepts, like patriarchy, feminism, feminist theory and Indian feminism.

Patriarchy is defined as a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is the head of the family and descent is reckoned through the male line. It is a social system that gives power and control to men rather than women. World over, even now, in some backward or retrograde societies, patriarchal structure stands rigidified and hierarchical gender structure still dominates. In other words, it is a social system, in which men have a dominant and privileged position. It is also used to describe as mentioned in a system of social

relationships, values, norms and behaviour patterns that are predominantly shaped by men and which also encouraged a privileged for men.

The emergence of patriarchy is attributed by Marxist theorists to distant past, when society transitioned from sedentary settlements towards private property. The practices and concepts of patriarchally influenced male- centric attitude, which is another name for masculinity, help to maintain gender - specific discrimination and it is this discrimination that has resulted in the rise of feminist movements and feminism, to restore piety and respect to women, who, otherwise have been dubbed as the ‘ Second Sex’. The deep- rooted mindset that man is superior to women is often connected with aggression and violence against women. The image of patriarchal masculinity, so rigidified since ages, serves to keep in place women and all others who do not match up to this heightened image. The natural corollary is that this also ensures that women should have less social, political and economic power than men.

In a very detailed introduction to Feminism, Margaret Walters has tried to give a historical journey of women in different regions of the world to come out of the secondary, marginalised and weaker status. Walters has mentioned the religious roots of feminism as the first instance of women taking initiatives in the roles that were supposed to be out of their purview. She has mentioned the name of Hildegard of Bingen, born at the end of 11th century, who started writing and composing and eventually “embarked upon preaching tours all through the German Empire, even though, at that time only priests were allowed to preach.” (Walters 6-7). Walters quotes another English woman, who compared Christ to a loving mother and says, “Just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God? (7). and when some sporadic event of woman raising her voice or asserting her identity as a woman appeared, she was associated with negative images and intent. “But any woman wanting to defend her sex had to tackle powerfully negative scriptural images of women. Delilah was treacherous, Jezebel murderous, while Eve was directly responsible for the Fall of the human race.” (Walters-9) The story of the emergence of feminist consciousness in Western history is very long. It is an established notion that women have remained a ‘silent’ population throughout the world” (Padia-1). While researching on Jaishree Misra’s work, *Ancient Promises*, the streaks of feminism and feminist nudging is quite apparent in live with the story of the emergence of feminist consciousness in western as well as Indian history. Her female characters too come out of the subjugation to which women all over the world are subjected to since time immemorial.

Creative literature in all its forms provides an opportunity to the writers to offer special insight into life experiences and sharpen the perception of social reality to its readers. Hence, as Anuradha Roy asserts “Creative literature has a definitive role to play in constructing the Indian woman at this critical juncture where she has an unprecedented opportunity to redefine herself and find her own voice” (Roy -11). Indian English women writers have showcased the issues of identity, subjectivity and subjugation in their works. The most important feature of the Indian moral and social order is traditionalism, subjectivity and hierarchy. Most of the Indian women are attached more to the idea of family rather than gender. Feminism in the Indian context is largely an offshoot of western feminist movements.

Western Feminist Movements: An Overview

The word feminism came into English usage only in 1980s as Selden Raman, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker suggests, “Women’s conscious struggle to resist patriarchy goes much further back” (Selden-124). In general, of course, first wave of feminism is associated with the writings of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. It is a commonplace

knowledge that Western countries were the first to bring to the fore the need for creating awareness among women regarding their demands, rights and social and economy justice. Western women especially the middleclass ones became more aware of the discrimination and injustice inflicted on them due to their gender, which had been perceived as weak since ages. The Publication of the *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 can be considered an important milestone in the history of feminism across the world.

As is obvious, the rights of women was the major topic of feminism at that point of time when Wollstonecraft wrote this seminal text. Hence, the first -wave feminism is supposed to have its origin in the democratic revolutions in America and France which gradually spread widely in Europe. The French Revolution motivated French women to voice their demands of liberty, equality and fraternity in France. Another milestone in writing was established by John Stuart Mill who wrote *The Subjection of Women* in 1861, in which he talked about ‘domestic slavery’ which, according to him is perpetuated by marriage and he advocated change in the legal status of women. He also established in this book that male ascendancy is the psychological foundation of all forms of oppression. Both these texts, though written at different time frames advocated access to education to women as a solution to uplift their secondary status. Jeffrey R. Di Leo, considers the time frame of first wave of feminism from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963). From 1960 onwards, there was a gradual shift in feminism from rights to body as in this second wave, the focus was on “ownership of the body, the nature of the body, abortion, and also women’s liberation” (R. Di Leo-176). During 1905, there was a proliferation of a new type of feminism which has names like ‘Girl Power’ ‘raunch feminism’ and ‘power feminism’. The advocates of this kind of feminism believed feminine characteristics can be used to enhance the power of woman. Third-wave feminists also emphasized the importance of considering multiple forms of oppression, including racism, ableism, homophobia in addition to sexism. This wave of feminism also sought to include and amplify the voices of women from diverse backgrounds, including women of colour, women with disabilities and also queer women. Primarily, third wave feminists rejected the idea that there is a single, essential female experience or identity. This wave of feminism also emphasized individual agency and personal empowerment, encouraging women to take control of their own lives and make choices that align with their values and goals. The feminists of this wave leveraged new media and technology, such as the internet social media and blogging, to create and disseminate feminist content, build communities and organised activism. Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards have been one of the influential third wave feminists, who expanded the scope of feminist activism and sought to create a more inclusive and diverse movement.

Fourth- wave feminism emerged in 2010s primarily among young women and non-binary individuals. Noted fourth wave feminists are Tarana Burke, who is the founder of the Me Too movement, Lena Waithe, who is a writer and actress and also advocates for LGBTQ + rights and representation, Roxane Gay, who is also an author and a commentator and also writes about feminism, body image and social justice. Another notable fourth- wave feminist is Chimananda Ngozi Adichie, who is also an author and also advocates for women’s right and education. Fourth-wave feminism contributed to a shift in the cultural narrative, with more people acknowledging and addressing issues like consent, body autonomy and systemic inequality.

While the term “fifth -wave feminism” is not yet widely defined or recognised, there are some emerging ideas that point to the onset of fifth -wave feminism. One of the key principle

of this wave are intersectional environmentalism that explores the connections between social justice, feminism and environmental sustainability. The feminists of the fifth wave are also seeking to dismantle colonial legacies and centre the voices and perspectives of indigenous and marginalised communities. The feminists of this wave also prioritised accessibility, inclusivity and the empowerment of neurodiverse and disabled individuals. They focus on climate justice, Global health and wellness economic justice and co-operation and lastly on technology and digital Rights. Notable names of the fifth wave feminism are Dr. Angela Davis, Dr. Vandana Shiva and Dr. Adrienne Maree Brown.

Indian Feminism

The status of Indian women, no doubt has undergone a drastic change, yet to club Indian Feminism and feminist thought with western feminism is an anomaly. Kapil Kapoor has noted this point when he says “As the Indian reality and context are crucially different and as India has a strong tradition, continuous and cumulative, of sociological thinking that has always taken into account the internal multiplicity and diversity of Hindu social reality and thus has been sensitive to the intrinsic non-absoluteness of sociological constructs, it is not only advisable but imperative to look into the whole question of construction and status of women by locating oneself in this Indian paradigm.” (29) If one traces the history of the position and status of women in India, one can see the graph is not linear as she enjoyed high status and prestige at one point of time and at other point of time, she was relegated to the marginalised status. From 2500 to 1500 BC, in the Vedic period, women had an elevated status in social, cultural and academic circles and she enjoyed a lot of respect and freedom, so much so that she freely taught and learnt Vedas.

Post-Vedic period showed downward trend in the status of women. She became more and more objectified and lost her independence too. Her behaviour was subjected to several codes of conduct. Access to education gradually got denied and she was also prohibited from reciting vedas. This was the period when women started being treated as inferior to men. She was gradually pushed into domestic chores and child-bearing became one of the important role of her life. Whereas man became polygamous and could marry any number of times, women, was not accorded this liberty. On the contrary, even widows were not permitted to remarry and were considered inauspicious. The socio-cultural bearing of the society of India had strong footing on patriarchal structure during post-Vedic age and this system kept on getting more rigidified in the coming centuries. In the tenth century BC, during the Muslim rule in India, more evils were added in Indian society, which were detrimental for women. The purdah system came into existence and child-marriage became a norm. Lack of employment and property rights for women, poor education, complete poverty made matters worse. Sati, female foeticide, prohibition of widow remarriage, devdasi and dowry system were some more social evils added that compromised women's status and position more. With the arrival of Britishers, the things remained almost the same, but, with the spread of education, an awareness regarding the pitiable state of women, especially in the lower middle class spread. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, came forward to uplift the status of women through their writings and campaigns. Before Independence, India continued with the retrograde practices like dowry system and child marriage. It was Mahatma Gandhi, who was successful in bringing women out of their atrocious shell and join freedom struggle. Women also started receiving education, and that made a lot of difference. Modern feminists are indebted to the writers like Toru Dutt, Shevanti Bai Nikambe, Cornelia Sorabji (1866-1952), who, through their writings in the form of fiction and short story exposed the injustice and suffering in which Indian women were trapped. In fact, the widespread awareness of feminism made it a revolutionary

experience that was later established as an ideology and a trend that continued in Indian literature in post-independence era too. The post-independence era saw sudden and almost exponential rise of women writers. The novelists like Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Kamla Markandya, Nayantara Sehgal, Gita Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Rama Mehta were some of the prominent women writers of the post - independence period, writing about the issues of women, that had not been touched hitherto. Later, the writers like Arundhati Roy, who was acclaimed worldwide as she was awarded Booker Prize for her novel *The God of Small Things*, exposed the deep-rooted gender-baised entrenched in the patriarchal society of India. The writers like Anita Nair, Manju Kapur, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are still engaged in writing about the silent suffering that females have to go through in the male chauvinist Indian society.

Like many Indian writers writing in English, Jaishree Misra too has been engaged in drafting the courses of life of her female protagonists entrapped in traditions and customs of Indian society. It is pertinent to quote Anita Vashishtha's observation in regard to the precarious position of Indian women, "Importantly then, woman in India is the carrier of tradition and a nodal point for change and transformation. She becomes the very site for struggle evolving precariously and compulsively into a victim-survivor, who is both subversive and servile by turns and will probably continue to be so till she achieves the optimum bliss she deserves and looks for." (129) Misra's *Ancient Promises*, too problematical, Janki, the female protagonist's journey to self-realisation and liberation. The novel showcases the concealed life of a middle-class Indian woman, who is caught in the dilemma of tradition and modernity. Janu is the only daughter of a traditional middle class Nair family. Janu represents a typical Indian woman, who has to struggle for assertion of herself in many situations. It is not only the question of equal rights, or to be at par with men, as in case of the women in the west, it is also to negotiate with the constricting outlook, customs and norms of most of the Indian middle-class homes. Women have to abide by norms and rules even in their own homes where they are born. Janu, like most of the teenaged girl, fell in love with Arjun, but the relationship ends abruptly as Janu's parents are not ready for this match. Janu's father believes that love is meant only for filmstars or foolish people. Her parents adhere to the customs and traditions and do not prefer her daughter to have a marriage of her choice. In this sense, there is a stark difference in the problems of Indian women and women in the West. Restriction in the choice marriage does not figure anywhere in feminist agendas or ideology of western feminism. Janu is forced to go back to her home town Alleppey, in Kerala. Arjun informs her that he is going to UK to pursue his higher studies. Both of them manage to meet at their friend Leena's house, where Arjun assures her that he would come back. But for Janu "It was all over." (*Ancient Promises*-52). Situation change so fast that Janu's parents manage to arrange an alliance for her with a socially superior, rich and reputed Maaraar family. Indian parents try to marry their daughters as soon as possible. Janu keeps refusing the offers of marriages, for which she has to tolerate the sorrow and rage of her parents. When Maaraar family come with the marriage proposal, Janu's parents felt very happy as the family is reputed and affluent. The parents try to convince Janu that this is a very good proposal and she should not refuse. "Be grateful for what you are getting We're just an ordinary service family in Kerala..... they don't even want a dowry It's nothing less than arrogance to say no to people like them I want to see a grandchild of mine married before I die, and your poor, Appuppa went without knowing that joy, don't do the same to me On what basis can we turn them down, especially as they have said yes"(Ancient Promises-61). Janu is unable to hurt her family anymore, she accepts the match and Janu is finally betrothed to Suresh on her eighteenth birthday.

Several other Indian writers have explored the theme of middle-class parents forcing their daughter to marry against their wishes. *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri also touches upon the tensions between cultural traditions and personal desires in an Indian-American family. *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth features a subplot involving a young woman, Lata, who is pressured by her family to marry a man of their choice. Another novel, *The Space Between Us* by Thrity Umrigar explores the complex relationships between women in India and the societal pressures they face. In some short stories by Indian women writers have explored the theme of arranged marriage. *A Marriage Proposal* by Ashapura Devi explores the theme of arranged marriage and the limited choices available to women. *The Proposal*, another short story by Mahasweta Devi also explores the theme of forced marriage and the societal pressures that come with it. It is relevant here also to mention certain non-fiction works also like *The Laws of Manu* by Suvira Jaiswal that delve into the historical and cultural context of Indian society, including the role of women and the practice of arranged marriage. *Women in Patriarchal Societies* edited by Alice Clark is a collection of essays that explores the experiences of women in patriarchal societies, including the issues of forced marriage.

For the sake of her parents, Janu sacrifices her love with Arjun and marries Suresh. She is unable to go against the will of her parents, and it is also because of the love and affection that she has for her parents that she succumbs to the family pressures. In Janu's story, Misra showcases the predicament of many Indian girls and women who dump their educational career and even their individuality on marriage. The issues of Indian women, one can see, are different to some extent from the issues of western women, but marriage is one of the transforming and to some extent even constricting issues for them as well as Simone de Beauvoir quotes the words of Montaigne in *The Second Sex*, "Marriage is a religious and holy bond. That is why the pleasure we derive from it should be a restrained pleasure, serious and mixed with some austerity, it should be a somewhat discreet and conscientious voluptuousness." (464) In case of Janu and many other women protagonists represented in the novels of Indian writers in English, the decision of the marriage hugely depends upon the insight of the family members and Janu had realised it as she feels "they had already dug for themselves strong deep foundations in the age-old traditions of their ancestral soil and suffered no mixed-up priorities. Unlike me." (AP.26) Janu cannot ignore the faith and love of her parents. She is in a Hamletian dilemma even when she hang out with Arjun, her mind is emotionally tangled "Here I forgot so easily that my parents loved me dearly too and were waiting at home with hot food and trusting hearts and their own set of dreams for me. So different from mine (AP-46) when Janu is caught with Arjun by her father, she is captured in the house and even her hope of joining is thwarted. Rather, she is not allowed to go for drama practice or even Maths tuition as she is dubbed as a breaker of rules. "College was for those girls who were serious about their studies and who didn't waste their parent's hopes and money" (AP-49) Janu's marriage to Suresh is a turning point in her life, as it with most of Indian middle-class females who give their consent for arranged marriage in accordance to their parents wishes. A girl like Janu, born and brought up in Delhi and married into a typical patriarchal affluent family is no less than an emotional and a cultural shock. And this kind of dislocation and displacement was quite common in when Jaishree Misra wrote *Ancient Promises*. It is partly the story of her own life. Janu had hardly seen Arjun, as in just on hurried meeting, the marriage date was fixed and the following lines from the text convey a lot "While walking around the flickering Vikakku at the temple with my head bowed, I'd had plenty of time to observe his feet as he walked ahead of me. I'd felt sudden lurching realisation that I was getting more time to familiarise myself with the feet of the man I was marrying than his face (AP-84)

The image of 'head bowed' and watching just the feet instead of face is a complete representation of how, women, especially after marriage were supposed to behave in complete surrender and acceptance. One can relate with Vidyut Bhagwat's views in this context. "Due to sexism, prejudice and discrimination against women being rampant in all aspects of contemporary society- its schools, literature, employment practices, even in its methods of childbearing-women have always been kept from entering diverse and 'male' spheres".(2)

Janu was a suitable choice for Suresh as she was young, attractive and did not ask many questions. Misra narrates the pennukaanal (seeing the bride) in an amusing way, targeting the patriarchal mindset of Maaraar family "He asked if I knew how to cook and what sort of food I liked. He asked me if I'd like him to ask him any questions, to which I said no thank you. Ma said later this was also good because it would have asked him a lot of questions. Without intending to, I was passing my pennukaanal with flying colours." (AP-59) so, Janu becomes the 'girl' of her parent's family who augments their societal status by agreeing to the marriage with Maaraars.

The real trial starts in Maaraar's household after marriage. Though, Janu belonged to a middle class family, yet the dynamics of Maaraar's family are quite different and the expectations of the family from Janu are of a typically patriarchal and traditioned made, to which she has not been used to. Even in an educated modern family, one can notice the discrimination against woman which surprisingly is acceptable to women themselves. They are conditioned to give priority and preference to men. This has been subtly showcased by Misra when she narrates, "The Maaraar clan seemed enormous and the meal time routine seemed to be men first in the dining room, children alongside at the kitchen table, then the women, the drivers and servants-----." (AP-83) Janu's consistent attempts to adjust in the Maaraar family fail and she remains an outsider in this virilocal arrangement. She is found constantly under trials to prove herself virtuous and the onus of this also lies on Suresh who is unable to do justice to his role as a partner amidst the rude and indifferent nature of his family. Misra also shows the clash between the cultural outlook of Janu, who is Delhi based character and Maaraar family, who are Kerala based traditional family. Even in Suresh, her husband, she is not able to find any support. "In desperate need of an ally I had not stopped to notice that the ally, I had chosen was completely occupied with his own concerns and with an overwhelming desperation for a stiff whisky." (AP-134)

Misra's script is touching bold and realistic Janu tries her level best to adjust and it was her greatest ambition to win the hearts of the members of the Maaraar family and she thinks, by giving birth to a child, she may find more acceptance. Instead of working on her education, she gives priority to impress her in-laws by giving birth to her child. But, there is no change and her daughter Riya is a special child with mental ailment. But Riya becomes her support system and her "potential best friend" (AP-116). It is for the sake of her mentally handicapped child that Janu gathers courage to leave Maaraar's house to do diploma in Special education. She knew that Riya, being handicapped would never be her mother-in-law's favourite grandchild, she feels trapped without a degree of graduation.

To liberate herself from Maaraar's family is not a smooth sailing. But, once it is clear to Janu, that she has to take care of her daughter, she is determined to struggle against the patriarchal which caged her. Betty Friedan's take on the urge of a woman for self assertion is worth the quote in this context. "... for a woman as for a man the need for self - accomplishment, liberty, self-awareness, distinctiveness, self-realisation is as necessary as the sensual requirement with a serious outcome when it is baffled". (Friedan, 1963). Misra, in Janu's transformative journey shows how a woman can change and liberate herself from the clutches

of patriarchal and retrograde traditional thinking. Janu is the representation of the modern woman who uses 'motherhood' as a powerful tool to escape from Maraar family atrocities. Her passivity and docility are gone forever and a new woman is born with all the will power to speak for herself and for her child. But it is not easy for Suresh and his family to accept that Janu is seeking divorce. They preferred to portray her as foolish and mentally sick to gain sympathy and respect in the society. She is shown to the psychiatrist, Dr. Krishna Menon, who puts her on heavy doses of sedatives so that she appears mentally sick to the public. One can contextualise Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubars' statement made in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Such diseases are caused by patriarchal socialisation in several ways. Most obviously, of course, any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, selflessness as in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill health"(2021-35).

Ultimately, Janu is successful in getting the 'divorce'. She leaves Riya to the care of her mother and grand-mother, who are the two women, who strongly and sturdily support her in her escape from Maraar's house. And she is also able to get the 'unpleasant divorce 'with the righteous support of Arjun whom she accidentally meets in Delhi airport. After completing her course in special education, Janu's journey towards self-actualisation is complete as she writes in Author's note in *Ancient Promises* "I married my Arjun eventually and Riya happily lives with us". (308). Crossing all hurdles of class, place and androcentric attitudes of the society, Janu's journey ends in establishing her feminine spirit.

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