

**THE AWAKENING OF NEW FEMALE IDENTITY IN JAISHREE MISHRA'S
*ANCIENT PROMISES***

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Abstract

One of the impending themes of the present literary scenario is women's 'challenging' for their new identity and independent life in the patriarchal society. From the viewpoints of recent feminist trending, women start concentrating on a new way of life for them, ignoring the predated social customs and taboos. Jaishree Mishra's *Ancient Promises* highlights the woman protagonist Janaki's challenges against the patriarchal formation. Her forced marriage of her parents' choice takes away her identity as an individual woman. Janaki's life with her escapist husband becomes monotonous until she gives birth to a mentally-retarded girl child. Her female consciousness awakens and she takes the responsibility of the child. She relies on her own decisions and comes out with new female identity as an educated, financially protected and independent being.

Keywords: *Feminism, Patriarchy, Feminist Consciousness, Education, New female Identity.*

Jaishree Misra is an Indian woman writer in English. *Ancient Promises* is her debut novel, which explores women's issues such as, patriarchal oppression, women's subjugation & exploitation and denial of education. She deals the novel with postcolonial themes like resistance and searches for identity. She gives voice to the women who are deprived of social justice that has not been provided to them in the patriarchal setup. The women characters of the novel are soft in nature, docile and modest too, at the same time they are active in the necessary situation. Post-colonial women writers like Jaishree Misra are deliberate in focusing on women's challenges against patriarchal domination, which has been pulling down the growth of women in multiple levels; both in the family and public domains. Women's claim for gender equality and freedom have become old news, in recent times, women proved their strength and potential by heeding themselves towards fixed destinations; ignoring all social injustices done to them. Therefore, they strategically acquire knowledge and wisdom for their empowerment. Their

attained consciousness against patriarchal domination has resulted in acknowledging their self-respect and individuality.

Ancient Promise is a novel that speaks about an eighteen-year-old Janaki (Janu), a Kerala based and Delhi born and educated girl. She is too sensitive to accept the rigid codes of the Marrar society in Kerala to which she is given in marriage. She is ignored by her husband and in-laws because they do not like her modest behavior. Soon after her marriage, her mother-in-law reminds her: "Like it or not, you now live in Kerala, so, I suggest you drop all these fashionable please and thank-yous." (AP 80). Her speaking in English would be deemed highly stylish and her communication in Malayalam always provokes sarcastic laughter and comments, thus, she is forced into monosyllabic replies. Though she is never tortured physically, no abusive incidents happen to her, it is only, "a long and constant catalog of very small things... so small and so subtle as to be almost invisible, could not do any grave damage, just rob me gradually of my knowledge of myself" (AP 110-111). However, she tries to be a dutiful wife and a good daughter-in-law. She tries to understand the alien conventions of the narrow-minded society, her tries are in vain. She observes that her husband is an escapist. Her sexuality is controlled by him and his family members that she goes under birth-control treatment. Jane is pushed into a small circle to live in. She feels isolated that she cannot tolerate the loneliness among the crowd of people. For the first time, her consciousness about her secondary position awakens her to have a child of her own so that she will be in the company of her baby where she is accepted. She strongly believes that her loneliness can be thrown away by her child. She becomes adamant about having a baby and believes that it is her right to have a child. So, she throws away the birth control device.

The next step of her awakened consciousness happens after the birth of her baby. Riya, the female baby of Janu had been declared mentally retarded, thus, she needs special education. Janu's intelligence alarms her that her daughter too will be ignored and isolated as she has been. Therefore, Janu sets an aim, according to which she moves. To monitor Riya, she must be financially sound, emotionally strong, this understanding of reality steers her forward to pursue a degree in education for mentally retarded children.

Despite all conspiracies, she is able to get selected in her interview and go abroad. Simon de Beauvoir aptly says in her *Second Sex*, "It is perfectly natural for the future woman to feel indignant at the limitations posed upon her by her sex" (220). It is applicable in Janu's life that her inner anger, the dissatisfaction of the societal norms and social negligence makes her want freedom from the Marrar society. She is well aware of the fact that, unless she immediately takes action, her desire for freedom will remain a distant dream. She is on the path of progress. Jane meets Arjun, who is still a bachelor, unexpectedly in Delhi, and she shares the trails of her life with Suresh with him; they both realize that they have lost the days of genuine love and

understanding. She now feels new hope and confidence that helps her complete her education in England. Janu sprung up to the wave of thinking that she will end her marriage with Suresh and will get her daughter, Riya, back. She does so, accordingly, and settles into her new life with Arjun and Riya in London.

It is obvious that to get emancipated, women is to realize her position under patriarchal domination, to refuse to confine herself to the relations, to cross social and cultural boundaries to which she attains her independence. Simon de Beauvoir aptly says, "Once life has values so long as one attributes values to the life of other by means of love friendship, indignation, and compassion" (192). This thought is fitting for Arjun as he selflessly supports Janu during her education in London.

Works Cited

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