

## FORCED RELATIONSHIP ENDS AS BROKEN PROMISE IN JAISHREE MISRA'S ANCIENT PROMISES

R. G. Abisha, V. Abigail

*II MA English, Department of English, St. John's college of Arts and Science, Ammandivilai 629252 Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu.*

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. John's College of Arts and Science, Ammandivilai -629252 Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu.*

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### Abstract:

*Marriage is often a forced relationship in the life of 18 years old girls. At the end of school life, they are forced to enter the marital life. In Jaishree Misra's Ancient promises, Janu (Janaki) is forced to marry an orthodox Maraar family Suresh, a work minded business man. As to obey the parents wish, Janu accepts the marriage life by forgetting the loved one Arjun, school boy friend. She is caught between two cultures of Kerala a village lifestyle and Delhi a city lifestyle. Jaishree Misra who started up her writing career in 2000, proves to be different from the rest of the contemporary writers and thinks out of the box. This paper explores the broken promises in marriage life, bonding with child and mother and the culture crisis between two cultures. The role of promise in relationship is illustrated through the protagonist Janu. The care and love showed on the daughter even if it is a special child, the mother never throws her child.*

**Key words: Marriage, Promises, Culture, Parenthood, Patriarchal society, Broken promises.**

The abiding fiction Ancient Promises begins with a scene of broken promises. Marriage is a promise of get together whatever life throws either good or bad. It is a promise to share love, happiness, laughter, cherish and respect one another. Misra's writings do not abandon man completely. Her protagonists search and long for a partner who understands and accepts them completely. In their search to find a partner who promises to reduce the burden of both the social and psychological pains end a failure. Misra believes in the concept of platonic love between man and woman. Her protagonist longs for a happy life with their marital partner. But ironically their dreams are never fulfilled. Their desire for marital love leaves them dejected.

The Protagonist Janu who wants to liberate herself is forced to tie the knot of marriage. Misra projects condition of Janu who wants to be educated so that she can attain financial stability but her dreams are shattered when her parents forces her to marry after the exams during her eighteenth birthday. Misra justifies that the life is offered by God and no one has to put an end even by her mother. So as a modern writer she steps her foot ahead and break the fence surrounded her married life, start her journey for a new beginning in her life. That's why Misra begin the novel with the lines: "My marriage ended today. Without the lighting of oil lamps and beating of temple drums, but in a cramped little divorce court, in the manner of these things" (3).

Novel begins with a broken promise and further victims the reason behind the broken promise. If wrong match is done in marriages, the happiness will soon disappear from their life and ends in separation. Such a thing also happens in Janu's life. Janu feels suffocating and lack of bliss. At last she decides to divorce her husband. This decision and uniting with her sweetheart lover Arjun at England makes her to rejoice her life. Hence there is no importance for promises any more in the marital life of Janu with Suresh.

With no promises of any more. And with the unspoken threat that you might lose everything else you had. Would you grab the chance with both hands and then use every trick available to you to get an extension of sorts? Would you shy away in alarm, convinced there was bound to be a catch in it somewhere, and let the chance slip away, fearful of losing what you already had? Or would merely take what you were given, with gratitude than miracles could sometimes come your way too? (3)

The divorce is a saga of broken promises. The decision to divorce her husband is a significant deviation from the fundamental pattern of patriarchal system. Here Misra poignantly expresses her views about the problems of marital disharmony. The author states that western education can liberate woman from the cruel chains of fundamental elements. She goes to England for Special Education for her child. In the later-half of the novel Misra shows Janaki as a powerful, brave, independent woman who challenges that Indian social setup. She faces all problems boldly. From Janki's life one come to know that total freedom is possible as she was determinant to make herself free from the oppressed and depressed life.

Janu married by the pressures of her family especially by her father. Her friendship with a boy was neglected. Before marriage, she is shown as a typical South Indian family woman and girl. After Janu's marriage, there is a reverse and revolt against the male dominated society. She gives divorce to her husband Suresh. She boldly marries her boyfriend Arjun. It all took place due to the education she received and by having been a member of a working class. She also has the braveness to live with mentally retorted girl child Riya. She even tries to educate her child. The women of modern times are conscious of their self, individuality, social status; image, rights, self-esteem in their life.

Marriage is a bond made with ancient promises which leads them tie together with loyalty. The bride as well as the groom should follow the promises made in the marriage. Both are responsible for it. Marriage is a promise of faithful and honest with each other. It is to care and share their pains and worries, a shoulder to pat while feeling down. Trust is very important for a healthy and happy family. These are the valuable ancient promises followed and passed to one generation to another. It is the duty of parents to follow and roll up it to next generation of children.

Wollstonecraft's Vindication emerged from the social and political turbulence caused by the French Revolution. Far from portraying women as superior to men, Wollstonecraft wanted to raise their overall moral and intellectual stature to make them more rational citizens. The ideal woman pictured in the Vindication of the Rights of Woman is active and intelligent, blending civic and familial responsibilities, freed from drudgery and debasing frugality. Janu, comes in context of Mary Wollstonecraft in her fight for stability through education. Janu's struggle begins with her entrance to the conservative Maraar household where everyone struggles for affection and acceptance.

Misra has given an image for new women through her women characters. Janu's marital life with her husband is a big failure. She reflects over her life. She did not like with Suresh and the Maraar family orthodox setup and so she did not like the ways she was treated by them. Janu yearns for a baby imagining that it would help her to get the acknowledgment and appreciation of the Maraars. But when she gives birth to a mentally retorted female child, all her dreams are shattered to dust. Above all, she is more dumbfounded by the mentality of the Maraar family towards her child. During the course of time, she comes to understand that her daughter Riya will never catch the attention of anyone in the Maraar family including Suresh, her husband and the father of the child. But Janu gives birth to a mentally retorted girl child which is almost considered as a grievous sin. The family believed that Janu's previous birth's sins and her present life's sins have bundled up to take the shape of a mentally retorted girl child.

Normally it is believed and traditionally viewed as a punishment or wrath of God for their or their forefather's sin. So the Maraar family considers Riya, a disgrace to their family and decides to keep her with a servant willing to take her to outer world. And thereafter, life with a retorted child seems a never ending struggle for Janu and she gets empowered to empower her child. Janu feels and says,

But a child-like Riya, left unloved, would simply wither and perish. Couldn't they see that her kind of innocence could only understand love and not the lack of it? My own rights had not seemed worth fighting for, but Riya needed me to be her voice and a battle on her behalf would be far more satisfying. I was soon going to become the thorn in the Maraar side. (132-133)

The ancient people believed in certain myths and they act per it. It shows their mentally of being disloyal to humanity. Disrespect to the humanity is seen in in-law's house. Mother- in- law is like a mother to daughter-in-law. But Mother-in-law is always seen as a broken promise of love. In order to love and encourage their daughter-in-law, they react opposite to it. She is shown as a barrier in the life of daughter-in-law.

During the love days of Janu, there will be a farewell send off to Kerala with a promise of returning back soon. Such types of promises will be seen in the love pairs life. This denotes the trust and loyalty in the love life. Meanwhile they both terribly miss each other. The distance connects them with more understanding.

I gave him a soft look to make up for the enforced chilliness of our farwell. I probably wouldn't see him for nearly two months now and couldn't find the words to tell him how much I would miss him. 'Enjoy Kerala', he said ruefully, 'write to me about it. I'll miss you terribly.' 'Get my address from Leena,' I said, getting out of the rickshaw. 'Two months will fly by... I promise.' (36)

The reputation of the family is carried on the shoulders of the daughter. The parents of girl must be careful and attentive in every movements of their life. The boy child's parents have no worries about the future of them. "The reputations of families were carried on the shoulders of their daughters, she said. And parents of boys didn't have to worry about things like... (this was her worst fear)... pregnancies!" (46, 47).

Promise is a commitment made by one person to another person to do something on a particular future date. It is usually made between two close people who may or may not be related. At times, the person who makes a promise might not know the value of the promise. This leads to a situation where the person may or may not fulfill the same. However, promises are never to be broken. Promises should not be broken because another person is dependent on the same. Thus, each one of us must keep our promises.

Janu's parents have led a predictable life and believe in children settling in life with their parents' choice and blessings. This is the format of ancient parents. Their daughter finding a life partner for herself is quite unbelievable for them. They believe that parents know what is best for their children. Janu is tense and at the same time thrilled to keep a secret from her parents, especially her meetings with Arjun at Chor Minar. But soon she is caught red-handed and the parents lose their trust in her. She is then taken to Kerala and her wish to continue her education after schooling is not fulfilled.

Janu has sacrificed her love Arjun. Her decision to comply with the decision of the family members shows how patriarchal indoctrination has corrupted the rationality and objectivity of even educated women. She is not bold enough to tell her parents about her love and to say no to marry Suresh as it would damage the good name and reputation of her family. This shows her abiding quality towards her family. Janu wants to be truthful to her family even she loved secretly.

The many regulations that a girl is supposed to follow after marriage teach her about the submissive role she has to play once she becomes a wife. Janu says: "While walking around the flickering vilakku at the temple with my head bowed, I'd plenty of time to observe his feet as he walked ahead of me. I'd felt a sudden lurching realization that I was getting more time to familiarize myself with the feet of the man I was marrying than his face!" (84). Janu knows that she is supposed to obey her husband's orders to become his mere shadow and nothing more. A woman is always allowed to stand behind the man, never in front of him to voice her opinions. Her expectations, when she enters the Maraar household, are shattered with a list of do's and don'ts.

On the first morning, she wakes up early and enters the kitchen only after taking bath as her mother has instructed her to do so. As she is not fluent in Malayalam, she speaks in English to express herself. Her courteous exchange of 'please' and 'thank you' in return of every dialogue results in her getting snapped by her mother -in-law. She said: "Look, you're not in Delhi any more. Like it or not, you now live in Kerala, so I suggest you drop all these fashionable Pleases and Thank You. Here we don't believe in unnecessary style" (80). Such type of promises was seen in the family. It is all about to obey mother-in-law and others in the family. She felt bad in such situations due her hybrid culture.

Culture is something created in Ancient Times. Everyone mostly follows without any regret and hesitation, without knowing the reason behind, like or unlike. Janu undergoes through a mixture of culture and tradition. The lifestyle and thoughts are different from place to place. Whether she/he is educated or uneducated, all have to undergo the culture customs and traditions in their life. Misra stressed the customs and practices of Maraar family in this novel *Ancient Promises*. The strict rules and policies used by Maraar create an impact on Janu's life after her marriage.

Misra out brings the ancient promises in the relationship of mother and her children. Mother has certain promises which is ancient and being transferred from generation to generations. Janu as a mother went England for Special education for her only child Riya. In England she started to live a new life and where she met her first love Arjun. After spending three and half months with Arjun, she realized that her daughter was her first priority and she cannot live without her. So she came back to India, where her mother struggled with her son-in-law for divorce during Janu's absence. This time Janu got divorce and custody of her daughter.

Parents promises to give all the goodies in the life of their children. Especially the contemporary parents earn a lot and it is only for their children. They buy many things which their children posses to have. They do all it for the happiness of their children. They sacrifice their happy times for their children wish. They care each and every minute. Here Janu takes care of her only child Riya even though she was a special child.

Without saying a word the -famous- paediatrician- Dr Vijaya continued to examine Riya who had started to whimper and struggle. Keen for Riya to be putting her best foot forward, I tried to hush her by jiggling her on my knee and promising her all the goodies that she loved. But she was having none of it and soon she was blue in the face, screaming her annoyance at the doctor's finger that were roughly examining the top of her head and the inside of her mouth. (127)

Parents of ancient times, spend valuable time with their children. But the parents of contemporary shall only give a promise note. In their busy schedule of work life, they shall only promise to spend their valuable time with their children. They try to spend time but work and over time spending for business sake leads less time spend with children. They knows their responsibility but time makes them to undo. Janu also promises to spend her time with Riya but time makes her to travel alone to England for the sake of special children education.

'Please don't give up on her yet, I'll work harder with her at home.' I couldn't sit Riya down for two minutes so the promise sounded hollow even to my ears, but I continued, 'I know it's a bit an experiment for you but we'd agreed that having Riya would probably be a valuable experience for the other children as well...' 'We had made no agreements, no promises. Please don't misquote me. I had hoped to help you but I don't think it will be possible any more.' (140)

Parenting remains a mystifying subject about which almost everyone has opinions. It is the principal and continuing task of parents in each generation to prepare children of the next generation for the physical, economic and psychosocial situations in which those children must survive and thrive. Parenthood differs in one generation to another. Like Janu' life as daughter and similarly Riya. Children absorb new culture and ideas at their young age. Janu's idea of dating looks strange and shocking to her parents. Jaishree Misra emphasizes the urgent need to restore culture in its right perspective. Misra takes effort to make the readers understand the full spectrum of emotions, from the heights of total delight to the depths of grief, as children grow from babyhood to adulthood. In the beginning, couples enjoy their new role as parents. But, as their children grow, they create unwanted anxiety in parents.

Janu is very fond of her only daughter and her life is Riya. She promises to be with her and takes efforts be with her always. She even worked in Riya's special education school in order have a glance at her often. "Somewhere in my distant past, perhaps even a thousand years ago, I'd done something that committed me to dedicating this life to Riya's care. Had I been a thirsty traveler at her door and had she taken me in, washed my feet, fed and watered me? I would never know what ancient promise I had made to her, just as she would never know what deed had robbed her of words in this life" (160).

In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Nancy Chodorow writes, "the mother senses a double identification with her own mother and herself through the child as she can relate to the daughter as an extension of herself" (24) becomes relevant in this context. This relation synthesizes Janu to a sociable person both within and outside the family. Also Hirsch says "Because of maternal dominance in early childhood, and mother's closer identification with daughters than with sons, women acquired a characteristically feminine, affiliative, and relational sense of self" (*The Mother-Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, 20). Janu's mother instills in her a strong and stable basis for her womanhood. Janu primarily inherits this feminine wisdom from her mother, with whom she shares a history of maternal power. Janu's mother, who conforms to patriarchal family traditions, instills those values in her daughter, prompting Janu to demonstrate them shortly after her marriage.

Thus Janu faces the ancient promises in her life as daughter, as a wife and as a mother. She bold enough to broke the suppressing marriage life and follow the promise in other situations of her life. She plays a vital role in the surrounding of ancient cultured society. She created a space to live in such places. She maintained her obedient promises as a daughter to her parents. She created a revolution in the patriarchal society by breaking the ancient promises.

Robert Frost says “But I have promises to keep And miles to go before I sleep...” The best lines on promises which insist everyone to follow their words as promised before their life ends. But the novel states that if there any marriage relationship is created by forcing, it will sure end as broken promises.

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