

A STUDY OF IDENTITY CRISIS AND CULTURAL ASSIMILATION IN JAISHREE MISRA'S *ANCIENT PROMISES*

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Abstract:

In this paper tries to look at how to Jaishree Misra's has been witnessing different forms of migration in the different phases of its history. Diaspora exposes the different dimensions such as cultures, languages, histories, population, historical places, and the period. The present novel deal with many curls of immigrant practice undergone by the female protagonist with their up rootedness, nostalgia, estrangement, agony of un-belongingness, identity crisis, cultural divergence, hardships, trouncing, cultural identity and hybridized cultural identity. Basically, Diaspora, a literary term, explores the minority community those are living in an exile. In some instances, a detection of diasporic cultural identity, as a pre-condition for a particular class of decolonized people involving access to greater educational and economic opportunities may raise the concerns of class as an important issue of identity studies. Janaki, is the displaced figure in Jaishree Misra's Ancient Promises, suffered or trapped between custom and rejuvenation. She converted herself in the domain of 'other' due to the hallowed norms of a patriarchal culture in Kerala. In her novel, the protagonist was eager to migrate to England for a university course. Another important reason of migration of people is going for higher studies.

Keywords: Migration, Diaspora, Cultural Assimilation, Identity crisis, Nostalgia etc.

Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* is a semi-autobiographical novel, published in 2000. The protagonist of the novel, Janaki allies Janu and her character all through the whole novel bears close relation with the life of Misra. They both have gone through the up and down of life. Misra fills the color of new woman through the character of Janaki who rebels against the patriarchal society by breaking the traditional values and norms. The pitiable plight of the women in marriage as wife, daughter-in-law or later widow as seen in Misra's novel makes the novel a realistic, contemporary, social document of the actual status of women in India today. Janu's journey though long and traumatic, makes her stronger and eventually

brings her peace. The story explores the story of displacement, disruption, and assimilation and undecided traumas of self-reduction of the protagonist's life along with the hybrid cultural identity of the second generation diaspora. The pitiable plight of the women in marriage as wife, daughter-in-law or later widow as seen in Misra's novel makes the novel a realistic, contemporary, social document of the actual status of women in India today. Janu wants to complete her B.A degree. The Maraar's promise to allow her to complete her studies, unwilling to hurt the feelings of her parents, Janu gets married to Suresh at the age of eighteen. Her husband belongs to a socially respected Maraar family. She makes a sacrifice for the sake of the family. Janu has to now ensure that she fits into the mould of the ideal wife—the Hindu Pativrata, taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures and different structures of values, the women's question, despite basic solidarity, need to tackled in relation to the socio-cultural situation.

Further, by eschewing the values, behavior, belief and language of Janaki, resulting from her life and education in Delhi, the in-laws are precisely ignoring the existence of a cultural diversity among hybrids, thereby simultaneously inducting the higher values of Kerala associated with a pure ethnic community that existed nowhere other than in a glorified imaginary past of Kerala. Because of the tradition and customs, Janaki cautiously departs from it articulating her cultural difference. Janaki challenges the notion of fettering of diaspora to a homeland as an attachment to the site of origin and reality. She problematizes the opposition of tradition and modernity in the Marar family. Janaki's parents portray the diasporic desire to return to the homeland, Janaki's escapade to London in times of crisis explains the differences in the thinking of the first and second generation diaspora. The novel evinces that the second generation diaspora cannot adequately explain affiliation to homeland. Janu is one of the Indian girls who have grown up with the notion that marriage is the only goal to be attained in life—the only aim of the married women in our country is to lead a life in the path trodden by the sacred and

much revered women in Hindu tradition. She wants to project her image as an individual, free from all kinds of conservative thinking which seeks to overthrow. She is ready to fight her way against all odds coming in her way in fulfilling her aspirations. She rebels against the existing patriarchal quotes and social norms which either in theory or in practice tends to relegate the woman to a secondary place in society. Her rebellious craving for individuality and happiness cannot but result in the breakup of family and relationships within the family. Marriage becomes meaningful and enjoyable when mutual love and respect are part of the relationship. The interlocutory character Janaki and her identity should be viewed not only as a significance of the dialogic relationship with an imaginary or generalized other in the Maraar domiciliary, but as a dialogue with the aspects of her otherness within herself. Janu is a Malayali Nairgiri born and brought up in Delhi whose father was an air commodore in Delhi. Janu (Janaki) lived in Delhi for the first eighteen years of her life. The narration moves to her journey from innocence to experience. She is brought up in a very traditional Malayali family. Her mother is a teacher. The western lifestyle gets deeply rooted in her mind during her childhood. Janu's lover, leaves for England for his higher studies. He announces his plan of joining his mother in England. Janu is literally put under house-arrest. Her parents take her to Kerala. She feels doubtful of her future with her lover, Arjun. Janaki finds herself in a loveless marriage from where she makes a painful journey towards a discovery of her true potentiality. This complex interpretation of a non-attachment to the homeland and an evacuation to the conurbation experienced by the second generation diaspora with a noticeable comfort undermines the monolithic nature of the postcolonial debate that normalizes and privileges concepts such as homeland. Janu search for her identity when she come back to Delhi, after finishing her holidays, and continues her love-making without the knowledge of their parents. When the parents of Janu come to know about her secret affair, they start to insist her marry immediately. Janu's mother who has supported her education initially, now changes her mind due to her affair. But the cultural and traditional value comes in her way to successful journey. Her mother prevented her to do love because she is afraid of her daughter's future and decide her marriage. Janaki fight for her own existence against old conventions she states: "What about my studies? I know there was no point even

mentioning Arjun, but my studies were surely good enough reason to put marriage off for a while. We've already discussed that with them. They said you could continue your studies in Kerala if you were very keen English Literature is something you could even do from home. I don't feel ready for marriage . . . I'm looking forward to going to college here."(*Ancient Promises*p.54)

Here, in the above lines she struggled a lot with her life and tries to secure her while searching her own identity. The play of identity and difference in diasporic studies constructs ethnic identity as a fundamental category within identity studies. Diasporic identity and hybridity, implies a sense of belongingness, founded on an attachment to an actual or possible homeland, its cultural heritage, belief systems, language, customs, manners, food, sports, literature, art or architectural style etc. are more useful things. The differences between a given identity and that of a dominant culture, the ethnic identity emerges with contemporary emphasis in the formation of migrant and hybrid identities. Janu caught between two diametrically opposite cultural values-the values of the native country and that of the host country. Because she cannot fully discard the cultural values of her native land under which her former generations had been so long born and brought up and cannot totally adapt to the cultural values of the alien country. She seeks her own identity and search for the status and position like that of men with equal sexuality and rights. For own identity, self-discovery, status, position and independence she struggled a lot with culture which was stand before her with tradition and modernity. In this way, Janu regains her identity the moment she decides to quit the marital entrapment. The Janu who returns to Kerala after the Delhi episode is a new woman. She is now confident and assertive and no longer experiences any dilemma. The heterogeneous experiences Janu is made to undergo bespeak the predicament of many Indian women placed in the domestic environment. Misra shows us how a docile and conformist Sita transforms herself to a daring and nonconformist new woman who questions the sanctity of wedlock and declares her sexual freedom. The story of Janaki is obviously a message to the present-day society.

Works Cited

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