

## AFTERWARDS BY JAISHREE MISRA

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### Abstract

Jaishree Misra a contemporary writer in the world of Indian English Literature has won her fame in the literary world with her debut novel *Ancient Promises* published in 2000. She focuses on the familial relationships and the struggles of women in family and society. The protagonists of her novels face disgrace and inhibition under male supremacy in their marital life. Misra is one among the growing number of contemporary writers who portray the sufferings of women eventually breaking through the boundaries of tradition and culture. She tries to elicit the psyche of modern educated women who suppression with tolerance and finally struggle for their own identity. Misra's novels value tradition and so face conflict between tradition and modernity. The novel *Afterwards* portrays the disgrace, dishonour and domestic violence of the protagonist Maya. She longs for freedom from her husband Govind who is possessive and abusing by nature. Govind loves her but his over possessiveness does not give her the liberty to be herself. Misra depicts the psyche of women who face violence in everyday life in family and society.

**Keywords:** Human relationships, domestic violence, suspicion, psychology of women,

Jaishree Misra explores the reality of the modern world and elicits the factors that lead to ruptures in the family relationships. Most of the characters in her novels show lack of communication, alienation and the struggle women face in their day to day life. In Indian society tradition and culture play an important role in family and society. She explores the inner psyche of Man-woman relationship and their quest for bondage. Her novels deal with factors like love, marriage, verbal abuse, divorce and the desire to keep up their relationships. She also portrays patriarchal domination where women are not considered and accepted equal in Indian society generations down the lane. The concern she has for the educated middle class women and their suffering is revealed through her protagonist characters of her novels. In spite of the different factors she deals with she does not exceed her limits beyond reality. Most of her novels are dealt with man-woman and familial relationships in the family.

The novel *Afterwards* is a story in two parts; the first part opens with the death rites of Maya performed by her parents while she was still alive because she had eloped with Rahul bringing shame and dishonour to both the families. Little did her parents know the deep misery she carried with her-for long afterwards? Rahul says,

A sort of air she always carried with her after that. Her halo of sadness, I used to call it, Like a still, sad pool that could not be rippled. Whatever was thrown into it. Almost as if some part of her had, in fact, actually burnt in those

fires and died that day. Perhaps that was what death rites are meant to achieve-when they are done for the living, that is (5).

Though she moved from Delhi to England to lead her life with Rahul and Anjali her daughter, she could not forget her parents and the memories of her native land Kerala and the occasional glimpses of the backwaters through the trees.

The novel is about a beautiful and young woman Maya who is provided with everything in life except the happiness and harmony in family life. She expresses her feelings thus, 'But, having had all those things, I know how little it can all mean if you don't have the really important things in life (57).' It is the loveless life and lack of communication that causes rupture in her family life. She tries her best to be in the good realms of her husband Govind, but in vain. He does not share his feelings or the business matters with her and even abuses her verbally. She is not allowed to have her social life. Maya's parents who know her suffering do not bother, She says, But what they want to see is that I live in a nice house, have a nice car, a husband who gives me everything. They don't want to see the other side of that. I nodded and she continued, 'Do you know people think I'm so lucky. They think I have everything a woman can want (55).' All these aspects in the life of Maya depict the domestic violence faced by her in daily life. Maya in *Afterwards* and Janu in *Ancient Promises* are the women protagonists who are suppressed

by patriarchal domination and lack the freedom to be their own self in their marital homes. The subjugation faced by them physically, mentally, psychologically and socially gives them the courage to liberate themselves from the clutches of tradition and culture. Beauvoir in *the Second Sex* (2001:482) speaks of the woman who was once the mistress of the house but 'Today the home has lost its patriarchal splendour; for most men it is simply a place to live, no longer overrun by memories of deceased generations and no longer imprisoning the centuries to come.'

Govind, Maya's husband gives her all the comforts for living but fails to understand that emotional relationships are based on love, trust, loyalty and interdependence of one another. She is a victim of unhappy married life. His possessive and suspicious nature is seen when Maya talks to Rahul. Rahul observes:

She seemed to have stopped listening to some reason, and the smile had suddenly vanished from her face. I followed her gaze out of the gate where a white Esteem was approaching the house from the road. 'My husband,' she whispered as she moved quickly away from the wall, taking the errant hosepipe with her. Something seemed to have closed shut on that pretty face as she stepped away (17).

Maya's loyalty to her husband when she says to Rahul, 'No, No reason, she said softly, 'he's not a bad man, my husband, just not very friendly (36).' Indian women are bound to traditions and be loyal to the family with utmost tolerance. When Maya loses her patience both physically and psychologically she paves way to free herself from the bonds of tradition and culture. Being a graduate in English literature she feels she can support herself and Anjali if she had a job.

Rahul Tiwari is an NRI who has come to Trivandrum to learn mridangam and hires a house next door as her neighbour. Maya becomes friendly with him and is moved by his kind hearted nature. She feels he is the only way to liberate herself from her suspicious husband. She believes him because he does not take advantage of her helplessness; she opines to him, 'You're right Rahul. You've been kind enough not to take advantage of me in any situation, promising me this and that...not everybody would have done that. Thank you (58).' In another instance she is full of gratitude to him, when he escorts her and Anjali to Padmanabhapuram palace. She expresses 'No, thank you for the company, Rahul, I enjoyed every minute (44).' Maya does not have her personal life and she is not allowed to go out anywhere making her life all the more

miserable with her husband. Rahul elopes with Maya and Anjali to Delhi but is aware of the consequences he has to face with his parents and the people around. The novelist is clear in delineating that the society is a mixture of tradition and culture and a woman who is denied of her identity in the institution of marriage acquires a low status in the society. He says, 'I could imagine Delhi swallowing her up in my absence with its easy thoughtless, hard-edged materialism (69).' His parents who are still under patriarchal roof are confused and reluctant to accept her.

The second part of the story gives a twist three years later with the death of Maya in a car accident. In remembering her memories Rahul blames himself: 'And now...now all that was lost too. How strange! Why had she been brought to me so briefly? Had she be taken away from me because I had once taken her away from everything else she had been a part of till then? Was this my punishment (175)?' Rahul feels the portrayal of Maya's death might have happened to make her way back to Kerala, her native land with him. The life that had been complete with the companionship of Maya and Anjali has now made him feel empty. His loneliness makes him remark thus,

I had never experienced bereavement before and didn't know yet that it had the capacity to change things forever. To reach into people's lives, turning things off, other things on, shifting this way and that. I didn't know yet that it was one of those oldest things that would affect every single one of my relationships, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse, I didn't know yet that it had already changed me forever (145).

Rahul expresses his agony when he has to leave Anjali to her biological father Govind, because he had not taken the parental responsibility from court to have his say in Anjali's future. Govind is particular that Anjali should go with him to have a better future with her family. He opines, 'I think she should go back with me to India. That is her home, she should never have been taken away from there at all (202).' Govind wants his daughter to be brought up in with the values and traditions of India. Maya unable to bear the suppression and domineering nature of her husband Govind, elopes with Rahul breaking the bonds of tradition and culture.

Rahul experiences the agony of Maya only after her death. He comes into the actualization of life when he blames himself for her loss. He sighs: 'She has been taken away from him because he had once taken away everything from her (175).' He decides to take her ashes to her native land and put them in one of the holy rivers,

because, it is a belief in the Hindu custom that if the ashes are put in the holy river the dead person will gain eternity. The pain and agony of her parents is well shown in her father's letter, 'Go and live your life in the way you have to. You do not exist anymore. We will forget you ever existed, just as you will have to forget about us. The Maya, who was once a child of this family, is now dead (242-243).' These lines of her father show how much her parents valued tradition and prestige of the family irrespective of the sufferings that she faced in her marital life.

Finally her father too passes away. Here the novelist brings in the philosophical point of view that there is no point in anything once the final fires are burnt. All the anger, misunderstandings and emotions come to an end. Rahul confesses to Maya's mother that he only helped her in the desperate and miserable situation; 'I only helped her to leave when the time came. Initially it had nothing to do with me. Although I don't suppose anyone will believe me now (261).' After the ash ceremony is over Maya's mother

bids him farewell, 'You must carry on, living your life well; you are so young. You don't know what happiness awaits you. Please promise me that you will (275).

Maya, the protagonist is a victim of emotional alienation. Govind and Maya lead a loveless life with no liberty in marital relationship. She has all the luxuries and essentialities of life but does not have the emotional bonding required to lead a harmonious life. Misra's heroines are educated middle class women who have the courage to lead an independent life. They value tradition but the agony faced by them paves way in deciding to lead an independent life.

### References

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