

## The Portrayal of the Struggles of Female Characters in the Novels of Jaishree Misra

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### Abstract

Jaishree Mishra is an ideal spokesperson and a representative of contemporary women. All her novels emphasise the struggles of women. Women in her novels represent modern women who break the shackles of the burden carried by women generation after generation. The household setup of all the female protagonists in her novels is strictly patriarchal. Domestic violence is sketched perfectly in her novels. An effort is made in this article to probe into the struggles of women characters in her novels.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Patriarchy, Suppression, Struggles, Liberalization

Feminism has brought about an understanding of women. According to the post-colonial theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay "Under Western Eyes", published in 1984, male dominance over women is deeply ingrained within the many facets of Indian culture. Contrary to the experience of women in the western world - where women's struggles for equal political and legal rights were conducted against the

background of largely successful interventions within political, economic, social and military systems. It has made women realise that gender is a social construct that needs to be deconstructed. As a result, women rebelled against their exploitation and marginalisation. Eschewing the standards of womanhood set by men for men, they sought to redefine themselves by their own standards. The last two centuries have seen a struggle by western women to dethrone the myth of femininity and reorder society. This social change was reflected in the changing image of women in literature. The woman began to do roles other than the stereotypes of sacrificing mother, passive sister, complaint wife, docile daughter and obedient lover.

When we look into history, the status of women in India was vague. In theory, she enjoyed many privileges and was given a goddess's exalted status. But in practice, most women led subservient lives. In the past, until the independence, men in India practised polygamy. Prominent members of society, such as high-ranking officials, landlords, merchants, and ministers, visited the brothel houses and felt no remorse. On the other hand, household women were kept in confinement as per the injunctions of the law books, which

stipulated that a woman should not meet any man outside her family without a family member present.

To bring up women from all these kinds of suffering and social issues so, many feminists and feministic movements are rising in several places. It gives full support and encouragement to many sufferers. Feminism comprises several social, cultural and political activities, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women.

Of the many kinds of feminism, we concentrate intensely on radical feminism, a radical reordering of society in which male dominancy is obliterated in all economic and social contexts. Radical feminists seek to end patriarchy by questioning the existing social norms and institutions. Radical feminist locates the root cause of women's oppression in patriarchal gender relations instead of legal systems or class conflict.

We know that feminists are not only females but also include men; that is, men or women who support and respect the ideas of upcoming women's movements are considered feminist. Different people have different opinions, so they express their views and ideas through their medium of expression. In Indian writing in English, many male and female writers show how women suffer in the dominant society and seek to abolish patriarchy.

In the contemporary scenario, there are many women writers who, through their writings, have been successful in projecting the existing social inequality and evils faced by women in Indian society. The list of Indian women novelists comprises Anita Desai, Shobha De, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Gauri Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Das and many more famous names. These female Indian writers tell the astonishing variety of themes in a style that poetry and novels are capable of offering. In their way, each writer has tried to convey their thoughts in a distinctly personal voice. Most of these women novelists are also known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. These are novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contamination. Unlike in the past, where the works of women novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, the classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today.

The write-ups are written in a confessional and personal note in most cases. Their composition acts as a social document as they are themselves sufferers and agents of social revolution. Among the writers of women's support, novelist Jaishree Misra is one among them who writes about women's identity and the pains of women in the cultural bonds.

Born in Delhi to Malayali parents, Jaishree Misra was brought up in Delhi. She equipped herself with an M. A. from Kerala

University with a post-graduate diploma in special education. Later, she moved to England, worked as a radio journalist at the BBC and was a film classifier at the British Board of Film Classification. She moved to Delhi again, where she started a long-term residential home for intellectually challenged adults. At present, she is in Kerala.

Misra has authored nine novels and a book of poetry, which she calls snippets rather than poems. Her novels deal with women whom the institution of marriage dominates, who are not given space, and the rules of patriarchy restrict them. Misra's protagonists are liberated women; they are educated and able to live individually. They do not depend on men. She is not against marriage but against the compulsion of marriage, which leads to the tragic end of many a woman.

Jaishree Misra's extraordinary succeeds in getting a significant new meaning when read from the perspective of crisscross dogmas of critical cultural thinking. Her works include *Ancient Promises* (2000), *Accidents as Marriage and Love* (2001), *Afterwards* (2004), *Rani* (2008), *Secrets and Lies* (2009), *The Little Book of Romance* (2009), *Secrets and Sins* (2010), *A Scandalous Secret* (2011), *Of Mothers and Others* (2013) along with a *Love Story for the Sister of Mine* (2015).

In some of the novels, the readers can find the portrayal of a meek, submissive female that plays a subservient function to her father, husband, and son. On the flip

side, Jaishree Misra additionally pictures the truly daring female, who breaks the clutches of patriarchy and leads an unbiased existence.

Jaishree Misra's first novel, *Ancient Promises*, released in 2000, is semi-autobiographical. It's about her unsuccessful arranged marriage followed by a divorce ten years later. Janu, vulnerable and young, gives up Arjun, her first lover, to enter into an arranged marriage. A long-time later, she's slowly shut out by the coldness of her husband's family and his indifference to her and her daughter's requirements. She leaves for Delhi to make a scholarship interview and chances to meet Arjun. Used passions are aroused, and the two realise they still feel great for one another. Janu offers to file for divorce to end the unpleasant marriage, flees with Riya to England, and restarts a new life with Arjun. Like magic, Suresh reconciles himself to a divorce, hands above Riya and all are very well that ends well. It's a moving story about marriage, motherhood as well as divorce.

In *Accidents as Marriage and Love* (2001), the Sachdevs, Singhs, and Menons are urbanised Indians with daily concerns. Nevertheless, when a foppish Delhi walla falls for a beautiful, wise Keralite and his brother finds romance out of the country, passion and comedy take control of the destinies. Based in Delhi, the story revolves around the lives of the Menon's and also the Sachdevs. The Sachdevs are abundant but orthodox, particularly the den's lioness, Swaran, who wishes an ideal but

submissive Punjabi bahu for the youngest son, Tarun. Nevertheless, her dream of playing the dominant mother-in-law gets shattered once Tarun falls in love with Gayatri Menon, a beautiful and bold Mallu.

Inside Afterwards (2004), when Rahul Tiwari arrives in Kerala for a brief break from London, he finds himself playing finally, co-conspirator, partner, and friend, the unanticipated job of a saviour. Maya, suffocating in the weight of a loveless marriage and a suspicious husband, turns to him for assistance. It's the story of Maya – her oppressive married life, her short dalliance with independence, and lastly, her demise. Abused by the suspicious husband in Kerala, Maya strikes up a friendship with Rahul Tiwari, an NRI that hires out the home next door. Rahul is the ticket to her independence. She coaxes him into taking her and the daughter, Anjali, with him to the U K. After a brief life that is satisfying in England with Rahul; she dies in a crash.

Rani (2008) is Jaishree Misra's most ambitious guide. It's a historical novel depending on Rani Lakshmibai's life and is set in nineteenth-century British India. Thirteen-year-old Manikarnika leaves her father's court-in-exile to marry the king of Jhansi. Little does she realise the burden of greatness awaiting her at this particular time. As she grows out of a vigorous and headstrong female into a female, she learns to put aside private disappointments & aspirations. This will make her come out as a competent queen, loved and respected by her employees. Soon, she watches the

political landscape close to her alter and shifts alarmingly under the command of the effective East India Company.

Secrets & Lies (2009) is a book that celebrates female friendship. It follows four females who live a seemingly glamorous life in Bombay and London but are haunted by a deep secret from their school days. Sam, Bubbles, Zeba, and Anita have a friendship that spans more than 20 years, created out of their years at a private girls' school in Delhi in the first nineties. Their superiority is being endangered by the arrival of a newbie to the college - the beautiful, gifted 16-year-old Lily D'Souza. The females confront a secret that has haunted the adult of their lives when called back again to India for a reunion by their beloved school principal, Ms Lamb. Lily's body was discovered on the night of the leaving party, and for 20 years, the open verdict has shielded the point that they might have had a hand in her death. As they reunite in Delhi, they learn the truth about what truly happened that night, and their friendship withstands the test of time.

Secrets & Sins (2010) is a study on infidelity. Fifteen years ago, Riva Singh and Aman Khan had a passionate love affair. Riva rejected Aman for a dependable Ben, who later became her husband, despite the good chemistry between them. Finally, Riva becomes a bestselling novelist, and Aman becomes a Bollywood superstar. Both watched one another from afar but stayed apart after their agonising split. Fate plays a cruel function, and they're tossed together at the Cannes film festival. Aman

is torn between his deep love for Riva and his young family. On the flip side, Riva is guilty that their renewed love will kill all the elements they hold dear. The novel is about how the star-crossed lovers decide between their hearts and minds.

A Scandalous Secret (2011) is an engaging novel about second chances and challenging choices. The story is about a happily married couple whose lives turn after a profound secret from their past is revealed. It's a comprehensive account of the heartbreak of giving up one's own kid for adoption, which was the result of having to keep a secret to prevent a break in the marriage. While studying at Oxford, a naive eighteen-year-old Neha fell in love and became pregnant. She had to make the hard choice of giving up the baby for adoption to avoid a scandal. However, years later, Sonya, who becomes a wholly grown woman, decides to find her birth mother.

Of Mothers & Others (2013) is an excellent collection of stories, essays, and poems that provide a brand new perspective to the cosy picture of motherhood. Motherhood for the writers consists of searching for thoughts about identity and establishing one's place in modern society. Themes of adoption, childlessness, surrogacy, grief, and abuse explore the tender and uplifting facets of this most crucial relationship between kids and their mothers at every age.

A Love Story for the Sister of Mine, (2015) Jaishree Misra's latest novel is about Tara's little sister Pia, a young aspiring

novelist, checking out the exciting story of 'Margaret,' one of the very first known victims of the Stockholm syndrome. She married the soldier who had kidnapped her during the 1857 massacres. She lives a satisfying life as a Muslim wife. When Pia stumbles upon Margaret's private letters, she eventually understands how it may have been easy for the female to fall in love with her captor and consequently be dissatisfied. Nevertheless, the more compelling question for Pia is actually whether her daughter may have been similarly in love. Moving gracefully between the gruelling summertime of the 1850s Kanpur and the leaden grey winter of modern-day Delhi, Misra weaves an exciting tale of hope and danger.

The position of a woman in a patriarchal society is reduced to the roles of silent daughters, wives and mothers. Becoming a wife and a mother are commonly accepted as critical roles for women in such a society. Murali Manohar also holds the same view: "Marriage is definitely a one-time bond since time immemorial, at least from the Indian traditional and conventional point of view". Misra speaks about the various occasions that lead to problems in relationships. She paints the complexity of relationships when elements such as loyalty and love are missing. She has a strong belief in the quest for the self, which hibernates in the psyche of the Indian women. She endeavours to make her readers comprehend the full range of emotions, from the heights of joy to the depths of grief, like the various stages in life.



Misra brings about the predicaments and problems women face in the intricate web of relationships. She weaves her novels around the axes of love, marriage and loss. She handles an array of themes which include rootlessness, bereavement, belittlement, incompatibility, infidelity, diaspora, family pressure, social pressure, rejection, relationships, urban musings, the east-west encounter, partition, and alienation, quest for identity, love and loss and the like. Being a critique of the Indian culture, she emphasizes her protagonists to enhance relocation in space and culture; Misra portrays the critical situations of society sensitively. Her protagonists tell how the conventional codes subvert a woman. A woman is expected to adapt and live according to the norms set by the chauvinistic male society, and her protagonists are forced to exist beyond their psychological boundaries. Shameem says, "Jaishree Misra believes in the dormant inner strength of the Indian woman. Her characters are created with strong individuality, which helps them break the invisible bonds of intellectual and emotional servitude."

Jaishree Misra maintains that the values of females are entirely different from those of males. In her novels, she worries about issues primarily limited to females, making them ideal for feminist reading.

Lamb and Zeba of *Lies and Secrets* and Neha of *- A Scandalous Secret* show the abusive selves. They display the destructive forces of oppression on female kids in a

male-dominated Indian society. Oppression functions as a significant factor that impacts and afflicts childhood. In such a sordid society, female kids endure infinite suffering. With their female potential, the protagonists struggle to overcome the suffering of this kind of oppressive conditions. In the process, they start developing self-determination to resist patriarchal oppression and an effort to liberate themselves from it.

Janu in *Ancient Promises*, Neena of *Accidents as Marriage and Love*, Bubbles in *Secrets and Lies* and Maya in *Afterwards* demonstrate the alienated selves. They learn the destructive impact of repression on females of the androcentric society dominated by patriarchal culture throughout adulthood. Repression functions as a crucial hurdle that suppresses the awakening among females. The heroines endure mental repression at the hands of their husbands. These females' suffering constitutes their feminist anguish and indicates the entry into the next phase of the evolution of feminist consciousness.

Rani of *Rani*, Samira of *Secrets and Lies* Riva of *Secrets and Sins* show the identified selves. They realise the need to assert their identity in a patriarchal society throughout the third stage of their womanhood. They celebrate females' attempts at expressing their female individuality. This particular phase becomes a positive force that embodies the development of feminist consciousness. As an advanced level of marketing the feeling of feminist awakening among females, the

expression of female individuality is regarded as a critical feminist theme. In determining the self,' the internal voice becomes essential at this particular point. In the procedure of integration, they create a narrative sense of self.

Janu in *Ancient Promises*, Neena of *Accidents as Marriage and Love*, Bubbles in *Secrets and Lies* and Maya in *Afterwards* demonstrate the empowered selves. They use their feminine opportunity and determine love as a redeeming pressure in their lives. To have determined the self, they obtain what they preferred and dreamt of. They do this by abandoning their husbands and extricating them from their patriarchal clutches. As groundbreaking people, they assert themselves and achieve economic freedom. For that reason, the women of this era like their autonomy and illustrate the third stage of feminist consciousness.

It can be concluded that the novels of Jaishree Misra house the preliminaries of courtship, reconciliation, and heartbreak. The protagonists of her novels don't want to be the stereotypes of the females that the male world has created for them. Although they have faith in domestic harmony, they find it difficult to adjust when their very existence is questioned. Misra has succeeded in painting her protagonist from the photo of real life. She has portrayed the new woman willing to trod the untrodden path. Such females are assertive, independent and defiant. This

comprehensive research of her novels reveals that Jaishree Mishra's women belong to the new world where they stand up to their convictions and expect their personal worth to be realised.

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