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**Women's Education as a Path to Liberation: The Role of Education in
Janu's Journey in the Novel *Ancient Promises*.**

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Abstract

Ancient Promises, by Jaishree Misra, highlights how education can be a powerful tool for women's emancipation and social advancement. The article analyses the role of education in Janu's quest for self-liberation, demonstrating how access to knowledge enables her to break free from an oppressive marriage and reclaim her identity. Using feminist discourses by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Bell Hooks, this study analyses how Janu's education fosters self-awareness and resistance to patriarchal constraints. Janu is forced into an arranged marriage that binds her to rigid gender traditions after being denied the opportunity to complete her education at first. However, her later intellectual interests allow her to challenge traditional expectations and assert her independence. The story stresses both the systemic barriers that limit women's educational opportunities and the transformative power of learning in changing gender norms. Janu's metamorphosis from a submissive wife to an independent woman demonstrates education's potential for personal and social emancipation. Her experience is congruent with larger feminist narratives that promote women's access to education as an essential step towards equality. Finally, *Ancient Promises* promotes the idea that education is more than just a method of learning knowledge; it is also a strong instrument for dismantling patriarchal oppression.

Keywords: Education, Women's Empowerment, Patriarchy, Feminism, Self-Liberation.

Introduction

Empowering women and girls requires education. Their knowledge and skills enable them to become self-sufficient and participate in decision-making. A significant obstacle that women face is the absence of education. Women are kept in a cycle of poverty, violence, and abuse in many countries because they are not given the chance to pursue an education. Education is the only way to change the world or the way society thinks. Each and every woman has the right to an education. Every girl, regardless of her circumstances or place of residence, has the right to receive an education.

Women's education is crucial to the nation's complete development. It works like an effective medication to restore a patient's health and treat them entirely. Women's education offers India significant potential for social and economic advancement. Through their contributions at home and in the workplace, educated women are a powerful force that positively affects Indian society. A lady with a good education can manage both her personal and professional lives. The main objective of this article is to highlight how education enabled Janu, the main character of the novel *Ancient Promises*, to achieve freedom from her husband. Her educational opportunities have a significant impact on Janu's journey towards independence and self-discovery, as she is confined by the conventions of conventional Indian culture and stuck in an oppressive marriage. This article uses feminist discourses by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Bell Hooks to analyse how Janu's education helps her become free and places her as a change agent in her sociocultural surroundings.

Historically, patriarchal systems that support male supremacy in both public and private domains have limited women's access to education. Ancient India had excellent women's education, but due to several patriarchal and family limitations, it declined in the mediaeval ages. Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates are just a few of the philosophers who have advocated for equal education for men and women based on their capacity for learning rather than their gender. As Virginia Woolf famously said in *A Room of One's Own*, a woman must be financially independent and have access to education in order to have intellectual and creative freedom. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir highlighted in *The Second Sex* how cultural norms that deny women autonomy and knowledge force them into subservience. Janu's struggle in *Ancient Promises* echoes these feminist critiques by demonstrating how education becomes a crucial location of resistance against oppressive traditions. The novel begins with Janu emerging as a young child, controlled by external forces such as her parents' aspirations, social norms, and an arranged marriage. She has no decisions of her own.

When her first love with Arjun was discovered, her parents denied her education. She currently has no formal higher education, like many women who are denied the opportunity to lead their own lives. Bell Hooks argued in her book *Teaching to Transgress* that education is a rite of passage for freedom and that Janu's early imprisonment is symbolic of what happens when women are denied educational empowerment. The need to fight for women's right to education is highlighted in Mishra's novel's realistic depiction of women being forced into occupations that limit their abilities.

Janu, the main character in *Ancient Promises*, was born in Kerala and grew up in Delhi. Her parents are against love marriage because they come from a traditional Nair family. Janu, who is young and vulnerable, meets Arjun Mehta through her school friend Leena. Eventually, they fall in love. One day after she started dating Arjun, her parents discovered her in the act. As a result, she was taken to Kerala, where she was forced to sacrifice her education in order to marry in line with her parents' wishes. She has accepted Rich Maraar's proposal, and her family thinks they would make a wonderful couple. As a loyal daughter, Janu consents to marry Suresh Maraar against her will in order to maintain her parents' status in society. She sacrificed her love and higher education.

It's been observed that parents prioritise their own marriage decisions above their daughters' weddings because they are worried about their social status. Consequently, women are compelled to bear the agony of a marriage empty of love. Parents sometimes do not understand how their children are experiencing because they do not change their perspective. Social expectations and conventional conventions have influenced the way they think. Simone de Beauvoir says, "As young girl's choice was always highly restricted, the celibacy except in rare cases where it bears a sacred connotation ranked her as a parasite and pariah, marriage was her only means of survival and the only justification of her existence. It was doubly imposed on her" (*The Second Sex*, 502).

Mishra illuminates the pathetic situation of women, who are deprived of the ability to choose their own life trajectories. Janu's struggle begins when her parents force her to live the life they have decided for her, disregarding her wants. First, Janu's parents set her up for marriage to Suresh, rejecting her desire to pursue more education. This is analysed from a feminist viewpoint and reflects the social pressure on women to prioritise marriage over education. According to Mary Wollstonecraft, women are frequently taught from an early age that their value is derived from cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, rather than from intellectual endeavours. Janu is led to believe that marriage is her ultimate aim, which initially causes her to put her own goals on hold. Yet, Janu's limited educational background opens her eyes and plants the seeds of her dissatisfaction with her traditional role. In spite of

her marriage's limits, she seeks opportunities to develop and learn. Her stay in Delhi was crucial in helping Janu overcome her struggles and sever the traditional bond in order to protect her identity.

Marriage is the beginning of a new life for a newly married female. Beauvoir quotes the words of Montaigne, "Marriage is a religious and holy bond. That is why the pleasure we derive from it should be a restrained pleasure, serious and mixed with some austerity; it should be a somewhat discreet and conscientious voluptuousness" (The Second Sex, 464). Her journey after marriage begins with expectations, concerns, agitation, uncertainties, and a mix of emotions that make it difficult for her to adjust to married life. Women in Indian society are bound by the customs and traditions that predominate. Janu recalls her mother's advice on her behaviour at her in-laws, house. In order to conform to her new surroundings, she even tells lies about minor details such as her habit of getting up early and her refusal to drink coffee. Many situations in the narrative illustrate a conventional Indian lady bound in strong norms and traditions and who refuses to respect the old traditions.

Janu's objectives evolved after her marriage, and her attempts to communicate with Maraar were unsuccessful. She does everything she can to establish her position in the home and their hearts, but she is unsuccessful. She tries to win her husband's love and attention, but he sees her only as a housewife and treats her cruelly. His personality exemplifies the macho, chauvinistic mindset. Her only hope was her daughter Riya, so she decided to educate her. Riya turned out to be her lifeline. As a result, she enrolls her in school, but Riya does not perform as well as the other children. Janu is a positive woman who never gives up. She demands that another teacher enable her to sit in school, but Riya is unable to catch up. Misra expresses compassion for the women whose lives are filled with nothing but sorrow.

As a mother, she is always concerned for her daughter. She attempts to raise her like a regular child. She was upset when she discovered that her daughter was being discriminated against. When her in-laws told her to leave Riya with a servant and accompany them to the wedding, she refused to go without Riya. Her in-laws insist on her doing so because her relatives will ask for her, but they do not want Riya to attend the wedding. She couldn't take it anymore, so she chose to enhance her studies in order to establish her own identity. Janu makes many sacrifices in her life for the benefit of her parents and in-laws, but she quickly realises that she has self-esteem and identity, so she sets out to find her own.

Education has an important influence in shaping one's personality. It raises awareness among everyone. Education provides women with opportunities and raises their awareness. It also imparts strength and knowledge. It is critical in bringing about social development, particularly in women's lives, which alter dramatically as a result of education.

In the book *A Handbook of Women Studies*, G. S. Pai underlines the relevance of education, “Education is a force capable of generating new opportunities for women, educate a girl and you educate an entire family. This statement of a girl western liberal has become the slogan of Indian liberal too. Education has dynamically motivated women to aspire for freedom, viz. social freedom, educational freedom, economic freedom, political freedom, and freedom for career and earning” (155).

Janu finds it difficult to leave home since she knows she will not be able to go far without an education. She realises that she must educate herself in order to forge her own identity. Janu chooses to finish her schooling. She completes her degree via correspondence. She later receives her M.A. in English. She works hard to obtain her studies; she has to perform housework all day and study at night. When her sister-in-law Gouri’s marriage is finalised, she is advised that she must discontinue her education and work from home. She is also compelled to quit her work. Janu then grasped the nature of Maraar and made the decision to leave Riya. Janu learns about the special school in London from Riya’s teacher, Sheela Kuriakose, and decides to accompany her there.

Later, Janu comes across a newspaper article stating that children with physical disabilities who attend regular schools benefit greatly in terms of their mental health. As a result, Janu chooses to send Riya overseas for her health development and is qualified to care for her child by earning a postgraduate diploma in special education. In order to gain admission to Arizona State University, Janu contacts the British Council and USIS in Delhi. She then receives a letter acknowledging her M.A. in special education. Janu's decision to leave Suresh and pursue her education in London was a significant turning point in her life. It is directly caused by her growing self-awareness and her refusal to remain in a loveless marriage. By focusing on her own happiness and her daughter's well-being, Janu breaks social expectations and reclaims her life. This decision could be interpreted as a rejection of the patriarchal forces that are trying to confine her to traditional responsibilities.

Janu’s journey to self-liberation starts when she is offered the opportunity to study in the UK. This exposure to education represents a more profound ideological shift from oppression to self-actualisation and goes beyond only academic learning. Entering a setting that values intellectual growth and personal autonomy gives Janu the strength to take back her life. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir asserts that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” (283), emphasising the impact of socialisation and education on women’s identities.

Janu is empowered by education to question conventional gender norms, a subject that is reflected in Germaine Greer’s writings. In *The Female Eunuch*, Greer criticises the ways in

which patriarchal civilisations force women into inactivity. When Janu returns to India, her appearance and situation drastically alter. She has changed from the obedient, unsure lady who formerly accepted her lot in life. Instead, she is a self-sufficient person who actively manages her life. Janu's decision to return to India to fight for her child's custody reflects her assertion of independence, a break from the stereotype of the submissive wife and mother. Her educational background enables her to see a different future, similar to Woolf's assertion that intellectual and financial independence empower women to choose their own futures. Her decision is more than simply a personal success; it also serves as a forceful statement about the bigger issues that women face when recovering their rights. Education gives her the language and context she requires to articulate her desires and assert her rights in a culture that has long denied them.

Beyond her personal change, Janu's journey focusses light on the systemic impediments that women encounter when seeking to obtain an education. Despite her intelligence and talent, she faces social opposition, family expectations, and cultural constraints. The narrative quietly criticises these limitations, demonstrating how deeply established patriarchal ideals undermine women's empowerment. It depicts the problems stated by Malala Yousafzai in her book *I Am Malala*, in which she addresses the obstacles girls face while obtaining their right to an education, and she says, every girl, no matter where she lives, no matter her circumstances, has the right to learn. Janu's journey reflects the real-life difficulties of women all over the world who strive for access to education in order to break free from oppressive standards.

Janu's path in *Ancient Promises* demonstrates how education may alter women's lives. She can fight cultural restraints and redefine her identity by gaining access to knowledge and being exposed to a freeing atmosphere. Her narrative supports the feminist idea that education is about more than just learning skills; it is also about regaining agency and combating institutional injustice. As Hooks rightly puts it, education as the practice of freedom enables students to accept responsibility for their being in the world. Janu's story reinforces this, highlighting education as the most effective tool for women's liberation in a patriarchal society. Her story exemplifies the lived reality of innumerable women who must defy tradition and cultural expectations in order to declare their identity.

Finally, *Ancient Promises* is more than just Janu's personal journey; it is a broader reflection on the critical role of education in women's liberation. Misra's work, which draws on feminist thinkers and highlights the hardships of women confined by societal expectations, is a riveting testimonial to the liberating power of learning and self-awareness in redefining

womanhood. Janu's story resonates with contemporary feminist rhetoric, reaffirming the notion that education is still one of the most powerful weapons for destroying gender inequity. Her triumph serves as a beacon of hope for others who continue to battle for their right to education and self-determination, making *Ancient Promises* an essential text in the discussion of women's liberation.

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