

LONGING AND BELONGING: TURMOIL WITHIN THE SELF IN JAISHREE MISRA'S AFTERWARDS

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Abstract

Jaishree Misra belong to the group of upcoming women writers in India who depict the image of suffering but impassive women eventually breaking social norms and creating crucial impact on their own lives and on the lives of people around them. Her main focus is on the plights and predicaments, stresses and strains of women and on the men who remain indifferent to the sufferings of women. She tries to educe the psyche of contemporary educated women who are suppressed in patriarchal society by all means and eventually struggle for her own identity. The protagonist, Maya in *Afterwards* longs for freedom from her husband Govind who is over possessive and doesn't give her the freedom to be herself. Maya is a representative of those women who face violence in familial life and society.

Key words: psyche, tradition, self, trauma, longing

INTRODUCTION

Lewis Coser, a German- American sociologist, explains conflict to be instinctual which is found everywhere society. In most cases, there is a purpose that we are trying to accomplish through conflict, and there are various approaches that could work. Conflict theory defines social conflict as unequal distribution of power and Max Weber identified these resources as class, status and power. The concept of deprivation has been updated by modern conflict theory and the sense of being under privileged is referred as relative deprivation. People under this state experience a sense of loss when they are unable to meet the rising demands. Maya also experiences the same as she cannot find any peace or solace in her married life.

AGONY AND INNER DESOLATION

Alienation is seen as a sign of personal dissatisfaction and is defined in terms of helplessness, meaninglessness, seclusion, and separation from oneself. The protagonist, Maya couldn't continue her studies because her alliance was fixed with a rich man. It's always the woman who sacrifices their career, studies and social life for the betterment of family. Her individual identity is not realised. It is the man who decides their choices and wants. She is taken for granted and this casual attitude is the cause of her suffering. Her loneliness accentuates and understands house is just a structure with no feelings and relationship. She even felt that she was thinking and behaving like somebody else. Jaishree Misra emphasises how a woman feels alienated in a male-dominated culture and how human relationships fluctuate depending on the circumstances.

Domestic violence occurs frequently in relationships such as families and marriages and is portrayed very well

in this novel even through the dialogues. Maya sarcastically comments that “but once he got me, he didn’t know what on earth to do with me!”(56), so he puts her in a nice cage. Maya is afraid of her husband, though he loves her so much. He is over possessive that he forbids her from meeting or conversing with other males. She is forbidden to socialise with others. Maya was even deprived of her education as her parents wanted to keep her marital life intact. Though she was promised to continue her education even after marriage Govind’s possessiveness and suspicion did not let her go. He even stops her from continuing her education or even doesn’t allow to go to shops or make friends. Her husband, Govind also prefers Maya’s parents to come and meet their daughter rather than Maya going and meeting her parents. Maya’s parents do not want to fully understand her suffering, even if they are aware of it. They are content with the thought that their daughter resides in a big house and her husband owns a car. They cannot understand why Maya is dissatisfied because according to them Govind provides everything to Maya. Her parents believe that marital bliss is akin to material pleasure, so they prefer not to meddle in Govind’s choices.

In the Indian setting, the family is crucial to the establishment of a hierarchical social structure since it not only educates its offspring and mimics the state's order, but also establishes and sustains that order. Girls are meant to be nurturing, loving, and submissive, whereas boys are taught to be aggressive and dominant. These gender stereotypes of men and women are not just societal constructs; both men and women have ingested them. Man is regarded as the family's primary provider because earning money and going to work are primarily his responsibilities, while women are expected to perform menial tasks and care for the family's children and other members.

Indian women experience immeasurable suffering and misery after marriage. The irony is that despite everything they never leave their spouses. Indian ladies place a high value on culture and traditions. To protect their cultural identity, they endure all kinds of pain. Maya too thought the same in the beginning she tried her best to adjust. She thinks that the birth of a child would make her life different. But her only hope goes in vain. Govind takes care of the child but his attitude and towards Maya remained the same. She was always bullied by her suspicious and domineering husband. Maya feels that only Rahul can help her from this situation. So she pleads to Rahul to take herself and her daughter, Anjali along with him to UK. In London, she leads a totally different life. She “had found her calling in life, helping vulnerable women and children. Even though it was only voluntary work” (82). After a short but happy life in England with Rahul, she dies in an accident.

The book begins with the death rites of Maya performed by her parents even when she is alive. This shows that their daughter is no more in their life. The society and family consider her escapade with Rahul to England as a severe blow to their dignity which brought bad name to the family. They even refused to answer her calls. When her father Madhava Varma realised it was Maya phoning, he slammed the phone in classic patriarchal fashion. In traditional families, it was acceptable to tolerate disregard and avoidance at the married home while keeping quiet and hoping for some sort of magic to occur.

The idea of family honour and reputation operates within a certain context. Shame joins in as an ally in this, and the two of them together create an unseen boundary to limit the movement and sexuality of women. Women who depart from this model by falling in love, selecting a life partner, engaging in extramarital affairs, or requesting a divorce are deemed defaulters. It is impossible for a woman to exercise her rights to life, to having a body, to association, to liberty, to freedom of expression, and to freedom of movement under the

current social atmosphere.

Through the novel the author skilfully explains how society, marriage and blood relationships let down women. Maya's strategy to come out of those traumatic experiences was to break the marital ties, societal stereotypes and liberate herself from the patriarchal clutches.

Emotionally, Maya is present in both her past and future. She was raised in Bangalore's metropolitan environment. They were unable to confine their existence to the menial tasks of the home. Misra investigates how women's emotional stability, decision-making power, and free will are under attack. Because they are imprisoned in the social system created by traditions and conventions that are biased towards male domination, women frequently endure suffering stoically.

In the novel, Maya's husband Govind Warriar is portrayed as a very enigmatic figure. Since Maya was raised in a city like Bangalore, he always has suspicions about her having an affair even though he has been away on business trips for days at a time. This is a representation of a patriarchal society. The sorrow and emotional torment of women who lose their sense of self-respect and freedom are intertwined throughout the narrative. It reveals how patriarchy denies women their uniqueness and reduces them to nothing more than objects to be used for the comfort, enjoyment, and gratification of males.

Adrienne Rich states that these circumstances arise precisely because women lack choice. Hence, they cannot "undo the power men everywhere wield over women, power which has become a model for every other form of exploitation and illegitimate control."

Despite her desire to run away from her husband, she is concerned for her child and the honour of her family. Maya's aim was to register in an interior design programme, take Anjali when she can live independently, and leave Govind. Maya's anguish touches Rahul, and he agrees to her plea to take her and her daughter to Delhi and then abroad.

The family practically performs the death rites 'padi adachu pindam vakkal' by closing the house doors for that specific member and instructing people to treat him or her as dead even though they may still be alive. Maya's escape with Rahul was perceived by the family as an elopement, which brings dishonour to the family name. Carol Gilligan's Ethics of Care outlines how a woman's personality is influenced by the interpersonal relationships and how their decisions affect others. She and many other feminist critics emphasize how the various traits of personality and virtues associated with women are ignored, trivialised and demeaned in conventional western moral theories. In other words, it is believed that women either lack or have low 'self-esteem.'

Maya waits impatiently to leave her spouse. She is currently prepared to shed a persona that assumes she will constantly be the target of suspicion. On the other hand, Maya's husband occasionally comes off as unreasonable. He does not perceive his wife's offering of ice to the new neighbour as any sort of assistance when he learns about it. Instead, Govind seeks an explanation because it is perceived as an infraction of discipline.

Maya frequently expresses her desire to be completely autonomous. She appears to be a free-spirited woman. While discussing their views on individualism, Rahul declares that he just does what he wants to do and go where he wants to go. He gives less importance to big things like family bond, statehood and nationhood. Here, Maya develops resentment towards Rahul. Not specifically Rahul but to all who have a clear understanding of who they are and where they want to be. Women can be freed from the shackles of patriarchal terrorism that

they must endure in silence within the confines of their own homes through education and economic freedom. One of the situations where the subservient position of women is obvious is the dispute between male and female. She understands that in majority cases the suffering experienced by women is a result of their husbands' rudeness. When all efforts to conform and fit in fall short, women make an effort to gain freedom. In such distress as Maya experiences, they find it difficult to tolerate the terrible life, create plans for the future, and make an effort to find their inner strength. The novelist shows real concern in the inner self of her protagonist. She gives them the required ability and courage to escape the golden prison. Maya escape from her oppressive marital ties and find comfort in Rahul's companionship.

The fictional world of Jaishree Misra posits an engaging picture of human beings who are split between their personal and social worlds. Her narrative seems to be dominated by the shackled self-struggle for emancipation from the grip of a disordered society. It presents the novelist's unflinching faith in life and its invincibility, indestructibility and worthiness. She depicts her female protagonists as real fighters, courageous and fearless. The characters' overarching sense of hopelessness and helplessness undoubtedly builds tension. However, this internal struggle is resolved by the self's idealistic and moral desire to end the stigma associated with suffering. She even shows the emergence of new hope and energy even in misery. Her traits are bound to influence the reader, giving them hope and strength to fight bravely against worst odds of life. Misra's characters are bold enough to face all undesirable consequences. They may give chance to save their relations but remain isolated or alienated and so they find happiness in their own way so that they can create an identity of their own.

It is a well-known reality that men aspire to dominate their wives in patriarchal societies. Society grants him the right to control her completely and exercise his gender power over her. To parody this assumption, Misra satirises it through her main characters. Misra explores the psychology of the contemporary woman who is unwilling to follow the conventional idea of a submissive wife.

CONCLUSION

Frustration in life provokes neurotic conditions. Maya may be a typical example of a victim of male atrocities and in her revolt against the malist society, she was alienated. She experiences a partial or total breakdown of communication and leads a lonely life. The readers would be perplexed by Maya's transformation. Her ability to make decisions deserves to be admired. She is quite brave and eager to start a new life. The novel reiterates the consequences of the decisions she took in her life. She avoids the standards set by men for men and tries to redefine herself. She shows that life is not static but a dynamic process.

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