



**The Space Of Married Woman In Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* And Jaishree  
Misra's *Ancient Promises***

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***Abstract***

All human beings irrespective of their culture, nationality, creed, tradition and language have their own spaces in their family, relations, work place and friends. This paper probes into the spaces of two married women in their families. They are from different cultures, tradition and languages. When Astha in *A Married Woman* enjoys marital bliss, Janu in *Ancient Promises* strives hard with her in-laws and husband, Suresh. She suffers because she is bicultural. The incompatibility of her husband shackles her into pieces. Astha realizes her mistakes in her domestic domain and comes back to her husband, Hemant. Janu understands that she cannot fit into the space of Maarars and leaves them.

**Key Words :** conservative orthodox, incompatibility, alliance, male chauvinism

Marriage is a socially approved relationship between man and woman. It binds each other into a permanent, official relationship of husband and wife. It satisfies physical, social, psychological, cultural and economic needs of men and women. According to ancient scriptures, marriage is regarded as socio- religious duty constituted to attain three important aims of life- the dharma ( duty), rati ( sensual pleasure) and praja ( progeny). Without marriage family is incomplete and it is also a social identity. All religions advocate marriage.

Marriage is considered to be a sacred institution in India. It is also believed that it is made in heaven. The relationship of a couple is the relationship of the souls. It gives a life partner, a team mate, a good friend throughout the couple's life. More than a physical union there is also a spiritual and emotional union. Marriage brings not only the union of two persons but also two families. The duty of a married man is to shoulder the burden of his family and he is the head of the familial institution. The woman on her part manages the house and does house hold chores, and takes care of his parents and their children. In short, man is the bread winner of the family and woman is the care taker of the house. Of course she changes 'the house' into 'home'. Generally a woman is expected to be a perfect 'cook' and

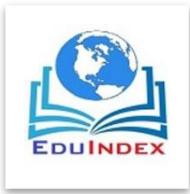
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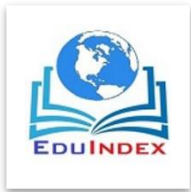
‘an ideal wife’ to look after all the demands and comforts of the family without any grudge. She must be a better home manager and administrator.

The joint family set up is encouraged in India even from the distant past. Strict patriarchy system is followed from time immemorial. Mostly in an Indian marriage, the bride has to leave her parental home to begin a new life with her husband amidst new relatives and new surroundings. It is always an anxiety and stress for any married woman to cope up with her futurity. As no human being is same, no families can also be same. All families are unique in their own ways. The family of the bride and the groom also must contribute for the smooth run of the family. Normally in India, arranged marriages are preferred. An article written by Paul Bentley published in Daily Mail says: “In arranged marriages, thought goes into the matching. In the West, physical attraction is important. But people must be able to distinguish lust from love. Strong physical attraction is very dangerous, it can be blinding” (Bentley).

Manju Kapur and Jaishree Misra, the two contemporary women novelists focus on the familial issues in their novels, *A Married Woman* and *Ancient Promises* respectively. Kapur deals with the North Indian family whereas Misra probes into the South Indian family i.e Kerala especially Maarar family. Astha, the protagonist in *A Married Woman* happily enters wed lock with Hemant, the foreign returned groom. In *Ancient Promises*, the heroine Janaki, who has completed her school education in New Delhi is made to marry Suresh, twenty six year old business minded chap. Janu says: “ Right foot on the first stair, I began my lonely journey through the crowd, up three shiny, polished stairs” ( AP 08). All women like Janu has to undertake a lonely journey in their in-laws’ house for a certain period of time. Their likes and dislikes are never disclosed to the members of the family in which she is married to. The following lines express Janu’s dislike for bananas but as a ritual in marriage she has to accept it.

I’d managed to quell the nausea and continue the pretence of eating. Just before lunch I’d had to consume endless spoonfuls of bananas mashed into milk, one spoonful per elderly relative. And now there was to be more, one spoonful per new elderly relative... was I allowed to say I didn’t even like bananas very much?. ( AP 09)

Astha is a very obedient daughter -in-law. Kapur writes, “the time spent in the kitchen experimenting with new dishes was time spent in the service of love and marriage” ( AP 43). She treated her husband’s clothes with great reverence. Even her father-in-law has remarked “how nice it is to have a daughter in the house” (MW 43). As Janu is bicultural she cannot cope up with the Maarars who are conservative orthodox and very traditional. She struggles with the seven necklaces that have looped around her neck. She was made to wear every single chain to show that her family is also economically sound like the Maarars. Like



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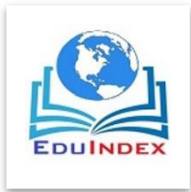
all brides she too thinks : “ I’ll find some comfort in making folks happy” ( AP 64). According to her mother, Mani they have got a better alliance.

Janu’s husband, Suresh cannot spend time alone with her. But Astha enjoys marital bliss to the fullest. Unlike Suresh he likes to take her to all parties and abroad. He gets angry with her if she does not accompany him out. He says that he refuses half of the invitations because of Astha’s wanting to stay at home to look after her children or work at school or books. He feels that he is lonely without her company in the party. Janu likes to be very romantic and yearns for a romantic look from her husband, Suresh amidst the big crowd. But he neglects her. Suresh does not take Janu out with him but asks her to take his sister, Sathi’s children. When she accepts his suggestion of taking the children he says: “Yes do that, that I’ll be much safer and better than wandering around Cochin on your own. Buy the children ice - creams or something” (AP 101). He does not accompany her to Thodupuram to see her grandparents.

Janu’s mother- in -law is harsh to her even from the next day of her marriage. She has asked Janu whether she wants tea, Janu said “yes, please” (AP 80). Padmaja has reminded her to “drop all these fashionable Pleases and Thank yous” (AP 80). She is embarrassed at her mother- in- law’s comment. Janaki cannot speak Malayalam fluently and utters monosyllabic words. Janaki throughout the day sits with her mother- in- law Padmaja, a sharp tongued woman and mocking little sister- in -law, Gauri. The Maarars want her to wear jewels that are never seen in valapadu. Janu says :“ I stood in front of them, a counterfeit Maarar, hiding Delhi insides and a very heavy heart.( AP 92). She too wants to adjust with the Maarars and to love them and to be loved by them. Janaky writes, “an entire paraphernalia of Kerala’s joint family set up leaps into life of Janu racing through a series of inane ceremonies, rituals, family gossip, inflated egos, preening, flaunting and crossing swords” (34). Janu says, “there were unwritten contracts in every marriage. To preserve and protect not only the person one was marrying, but in a sense their whole family as well” (AP 241). Hemant in *A Married Woman* also lives with his parents and there is only a cordial relationship between his wife, Astha and his parents. At times his mother checks Astha for joining with the activist group. She utters:

You know I never try and stop you from doing anything. Even when you neglect the children, and are busy in your paintings and meetings, I do not say anything. I am not the type to interfere. I am glad my daughter-in-law does not feel she has to sit at home. Till I have the use of my hands and feet I will help you, but it is my duty to point out that you are going too far. ( MW 187)

She is not dominating like Padmaja in *Ancient Promises*. Astha’s mother-in-law is polite and gentle towards her.



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Suresh is an escapist. She is not able to defend her own family when Gauri has questioned the marital status of her grand parents. Even Suresh cannot check his sister but finds fault with Janu. He says Janu that being a single child to her parents, she cannot adjust with Gauri's mocking statement. He never attempts to favour Janu in domestic crises. When he discloses her pregnancy to Suresh, he leisurely tells her that only his mother and Sathi know what to do. Visiting neighbours, friends, relatives and gossiping about them are their past times which Janu never likes. They speak ill about the snacks and cleaning of their hostess on their return to house. She tells: " On our way back in the car one of us would comment on how awful the pakavadas tasted ( 'Fried in old oil at that Tastee Bakery, no doubt' ) and did you notice the dust under the sofa ( 'hasn't been swept in months!)?( AP 99). She says, " I'd given the marriage a fair chance, no one could deny I'd tried my best, changing my whole personality to fit in with the Maarars" ( AP 121). Though she plans to quit the Maarars once for all, she helps them in Gauri's wedding. At last she comes out her dissolution of marriage with Suresh: "It was his role in life to provide for and protect his women folk, like other men of his generation, he did that unquestioningly and he did it well" ( AP 165).

The problem in Astha's marital life enters when she takes up teaching profession. Hemant feels that teaching job is safe and need not stay out odd hours. Her friendship with Aijaz Akhtar Khan, the prime mover and shaker of the Street Theatre Group has changed her personality. Later she becomes an activist with the help of Reshana and a lesbian by the grace of Pip, the wife of deceased Aijaz. When Hemant regrets for working in India where he earns only a little. She says, " money isn't everything darling. Look you have your family, me, our parents" (MW 50). Such a woman neglects her duty as a wife and a mother later. When Astha is with her family she was a " wife, mother, sister-in-law, daughter-in-law" (MW 160). Hemant wants her to write a letter to the newspaper to express her ideas or views instead of protesting on the streets. Though she is immersed in protest she thinks of her children at times.

The novelist writes: "Astha was a woman and she was sick of sacrifice" ( 168). She craves for individual identity as a poet, painter, and speaker. She proclaims : " I am thirty six. I need to be independent. I am always adjusting to everybody else's needs" ( MW 247). Astha feels : " A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth were the necessary prerequisites of Hemant's wife" (MW 231). She feels that husbands should not teach wives that make their relationship deteriorates . Her longing for appreciation from Hemant has got at last when he has arranged for a review meeting of her paintings. Finally she realizes:

I was running off on a wild goose chase, neglecting my family and burdening his poor mother with my responsibilities. I had no sense of what was fitting for a woman, I hadn't bothered to ask him whether it was appropriate or convenient. Ever since Aijaz had died, and



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I had started being exploited by the Manch, and gone to Ayodhya, and met Pipeelika Khan, I had no sense of home, duty, wifehood or motherhood. ( MW 248)

Astha has realized her mistake and gets united with the family. But Suresh pretends to her to make her retain in the bond of marriage. He does not want to lose her for the sake of his society. So he says:

I realize I have not been the best husband, but it's not my fault for, I have a business to run (self pity). In the past few years, it's kept me too busy, but now, from this year, things are going to be different (hopeful). I'll get much more time for you and Riya, we'll be able to go on holidays together (eager), like Chettan and Latha do. ( AP 217)

With the help of the doctor, Dr. Krishna Menon, he announces that she is insane because of disabled Riya. Janu breaks the wed lock, gets back her daughter and rejoins with Arjun, her ex-lover.

Married Women have their own spaces in their wed lock. The two selected novels are contrast with each other. When Astha enjoys full marital happiness, Janu is deprived of romantic pleasures. Astha has got better – in-laws than Janu. Hemant seeks Astha's company in his outings but Suresh never does. The feministic attitude and craving for individual identity makes her take a wrong turn, suffer and rejoins with her husband. The male chauvinism, incompatibility and pretension of Suresh mars the familial bond.

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