

## Women and Marginalization in Jaishree Misra's *A Scandalous Secret*

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### Abstract

The Indian culture nurtures and highly values the family integrity and so the stretching of traditional values becomes a part of an individual's dreams in life. Hence in India westernization of the culture becomes a social taboo. The walls of confinement become a part of married woman's life, the fascination towards one's own dream and the related decisions shatter due to the preservation of culture.

Jaishree Misra's, novel *A Scandalous Secret* portrays the pressure and mental conflict faced by the protagonist Neha due to the conventional culture. Neha, obsessed in love with her Professor, surrenders herself to his lust. The early pregnancy of the former and the distressing state makes her desert her new-born daughter to an English couple. The society where premarital sex and maternity is considered a sin makes her abandon her child and marry an Indian according to the wishes of her parents. The concealed relationship with her daughter makes her stand between truth and trauma and makes her marginalised in terms of cultural ethics. This paper will elaborately deal with 'Women and Marginalisation' as it is portrayed in Jaishree Misra's fictional works.

**Keywords:** Jaishree Misra, *A Scandalous Secret*, Women, Society, Cultural ethics, Westernisation, marginalisation

Jaishree Misra was born in New Delhi to a Malayali family in 1961. In 2000 she started her writing career. All her novels give awareness to the people, particularly women. Her novel *A Scandalous Secret* deals with the story of a woman, who gave birth to a child in her teens. Her daughter was born with special needs, led her to the realm of Special Education in 1990. At that time, she left for England to do a post graduate diploma at the institute of Education in London.

Misra's novels deal with female predicament, not only about female sufferings but also about how female children affects. She takes efforts to give solution to many problems described in her novels. Through her novels, she is interested in teaching lesson to the readers.

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R. Karpagam, Research Scholar and Dr. P. Madhan, Women and Marginalization in Jaishree Misra's  
*A Scandalous Secret* 261

Misra has relentlessly campaigns for women to abandon their inferiority complexes and to be proud of being born as a woman. She teaches women to shed their submissive attitudes and ways to deal with life and develop as women who have increased genuine strengthening to confront any sort of test throughout everyday life.

Jaishree Misra, a prominent writer in English literature is the great niece of the late Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, who is the famous Malayalam writer. She has worked for several years in the Child Care Department of Social Services in Buckinghamshire. She has also worked as a film classifier at the British Board of Film Classification in London, England.

Jaishree Misra offers real life situations and her characters are real human beings with soul. Naturally, their path to achieve deliverance is not a flower bed to walk on but a thorny path filled with obstruction, mind break-down and ruins. Only by overcoming clogs and hindrance, Jaishree Misra's women achieve freedom in the real sense. She does not wish to be the obedient mouthpiece of male writers.

Though Jaishree Misra does not give any alternatives to the problems that are faced by Indian women, the final decision of her novel presents some hope to the readers. Misra is trying to grant some awareness to women through her novel to free them from this society, which treats them as slaves. She is well known for her realistic exposure of the problems faced by the highbrow urban women of Kerala, Delhi and London.

Jaishree Misra's seventh work of fiction is *A Scandalous Secret* and the third in her 'Secret' series. Neha Chaturvedi, who appears as the protagonist of this novel, lives a life that is straight out of a fairytale. Married to the rich, influential and highly dignified Sharat Chaturvedi, Neha is a blissfully happy woman and the envy of many in her family and friends. At the age of eighteen, as a young student, she went to Oxford for a degree but left unceremoniously after a year.

Today she has left her past completely behind her and is now totally involved in the new life she and Sharat have created. Sharat, her husband, is 'her rock'. Riches, glamour, and grandeur- she has it all. Yet, she also has an eighteen year old secret tucked away in the inner recesses of her heart – 'a scandalous secret' that she sternly does not permit herself to dwell upon till a letter with a British postage arrives unexpectedly to tear away the fabric of her composure and equanimity forever.

Sonya, the daughter Neha forsook and gave up for adoption as an eighteen-year old student in Oxford, is the second protagonist of the story. Adopted and brought up by the loving Richard and Laura Shaw, Sonya has enjoyed a warm and protected childhood and is the apple of her parents' eyes. As a child Sonya has 'wanted for nothing'. Her parents have given her everything within their modest reach- including ballet and horse riding lessons. Though an

integral part of this loving English family, questions about her true parentage have been ‘like a missing piece in a jigsaw puzzle’.

At eighteen she is a confident young lady, standing poised to take off in her career, having already gained admission to Oxford. But being eighteen also grants her the legal right, under U.K. laws, to trace her roots. Thus, Sonya has traced her birth mother, Neha Chaturvedi to Delhi, India and is set to go there to meet Neha and find answers to questions that have haunted her all her young life. Sonya writes to Neha to inform her of her imminent arrival.

Neha’s golden world comes crashing down. She is conflict ridden and a wreck. Should she confide in Sharat? Would Sharat ever understand her? Would their relationship survive this new revelation? Would Sonya advent spell doom for their marriage, their social standing, and Sharat’s political ambitions?

Sonya comes to Delhi with Estelle, her best friend of thirteen years, the owner of the B&B they stay in, the garrulous Mrs. Mahajan introduces them to Keshav, their driver and guide and Sonya finds herself attracted to him.

Neha goes to Ananda to calm the tremendous emotional anguish in her mind where she meets Arif, an elderly lawyer. He plays a pivotal role in helping Neha to relive the agony of her past and realize that she was not entirely to shame for all that had happened in Oxford eighteen years back. It is the peace of Ananda and Arif’s counsel that convinces Neha that she would fight circumstances tooth and nail to save her marriage to Sharat. Arif also plays a crucial role in helping Sharat to come to terms with the sudden upheaval in his life and put things in perspective. Neha’s confrontation with Sonya, their conflict and its eventual resolution follow as does Neha’s confrontation with Sharat.

Marginalization can be of different types based on colour, race, religion, culture, gender and ethnicity. Women are marginalized right from their birth based on their gender. Jaishree Misra presents the struggle and misery faced by women generally. She further depicts the success of her women characters overcoming their struggles.

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