

## Portrayal of Neha as Distressed Self in Jaishree Misra's *A Scandalous Secret*

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### ABSTRACT

In India people give more importance to family integrity and traditional values. Marriage plays a pivotal role for preserving all these culture and traditions. In a family both the husband and wife have to sacrifice their own dreams and fascination for a good relationship. Indian women have many do's and don'ts that has to be followed. The early pregnancy of a girl is considered as a sin and she is pointed as a bad woman. Jaishree Misra's novel *A Scandalous Secret* portrays the pressure and mental conflict faced by the protagonist Neha. She and her parents are afraid of the conventional culture. While studying at Oxford an eighteen-year-old Neha fell in love with her professor then gave birth to a baby girl. The premarital sex and maternity are considered as a sin in the society. It makes her abandon her child and give up to adoption. Later she has married an Indian according to the wishes of her parents. She concealed all these secrets for several years. Neha is a mother at the time she is a wonderful wife. In this novel Misra gives a clear account of the mental conflict and pressure in the mind of Neha

**Keywords:** Mental conflict, Marriage, Good relationship

Jaishree Mishra was born in New Delhi to a Malayali family in 1961. In 2000 she started her writing career. Jaishree Misra's seventh work of fiction is *A Scandalous Secret* and the third novel in her Secret Series. The story is about motherhood; mothers and daughters. The golden couple of Delhi, Neha and Sharat have glamour, money and a beautiful home. Neha is a blissfully happy woman and the envy of many in her family and friends. But there is a dark secret in Neha's mind. It haunted her like a nightmare.

While studying at Oxford an eighteen-year-old Neha fell pregnant by her professor. She is forced to make the difficult decision to give the baby up for adoption. But years later her little girl, Sonya is now a fully grown woman and determined to find her birth mother.

Here Misra gives a detailed description about the mental agony of Neha that she had faced during her pregnancy. Neha recollects how she had delivered her baby as a young unmarried University student. Her mental condition is more crucial while thinking about the society. The hospital counsellor had advised her not to bond with the baby, avoid breastfeed and not to name her child. As an unmarried young student, she has accepted all these and she had decided to give up the baby for adoption. The main mistake from Neha's part is that she believed her professor, Alastair and hoping that he will take care them after the child birth. Three months into her pregnancy Neha informed Alastair and begged to take some interest in her. But during

the Easter break, she had disappeared from the campus. Neha had realised total rejection. No girls can imagine such a crucial situation. Neha is pushed to an extreme level of disappointment. She is isolated from everyone and she is not able to convey her helplessness to anyone. It was intolerable to her.

Misra portrays her characters are facing alienation and isolation. Her writing is an effort to discover and convey the true significance of things. Hear Neha as a young woman of eighteen-year old has to face alienation confronted with tension, worries, depression, disappointment anxiety and fear. Alastair no longer wants Neha and his baby. The indifferent behaviour of Alastair towards Neha gets reflected. Neha intensely Desire to get support from him. The social worker had informed Neha that the baby would be first taken to a foster home and then will be taken care by an experienced foster mother. This frightens her inner self. She tries to convince him but in vain. So, he decided to take the most crucial decision in her life. The agony is now greater. Her self is haunted by rejection of motherhood.

Neha's endless fear shows that she lacks emotional maturity and emotional stability. It makes her more helpless. When the baby was taken away from her, she wept for herself and the dirty mess she had created. She is losing her baby and her Oxford dream also. This is the typical condition of a person who feels alienated. Neha is not able to overcome that traumatic adulthood, in which she becomes a constant victim to sexual abuse. Her inner agony is so intense. Neha believes that the abuse is her on fault.

Today she has left her past completely and silently moving to a new full filling life to her. Neha is extremely faithful to her husband Sharath. He is always there like a pillar of strength who comforted her and she enjoyed her husband's undivided attention and affection. She moves to London and she begins her marital life with him. Neha is a classic example of the fostering self. Neha's progress to an empowered woman does not happen overnight. She is an inspiration to all the abused women. Not only Neha but many Indian women suffer from such a problem that has no name. Perhaps Misra draws the attention of the readers towards the condition of women in our contemporary society. The Indian society tells a woman that it is sinful to be pregnant before marriage. The society fails to pin point the brutal mistakes of men. The majority of women are still sufferers. Here Neha is charged but her professor is not accuse or blamed.

Sonya, the daughter of Neha gave up for adoption. She is the second protagonist of the story. She is adopted and brought up by the loving English family, Richard and Laura Shaw. Sonya has enjoyed every day in her childhood. They provide everything she needs. Though Neha and Sonia are physically apart, they are biological connected. After giving up the baby for adoption, Neha finds the true love for her life, Sharat. Neha remains silent about her previous affair on account of the cursing nature of the society.

At eighteen she is a confident young lady. She is having gained admission to Oxford. Being eighteen also grants her the legal right under UK laws, to trace her roots. Then she decides to trace her roots. Sonya realises the fact that her biological mother is Neha Chaturvedi from Delhi, India. Then she writes a letter to Neha informing her desire to meet her.

Though Misra does not present any solution or alternative to the problems that are faced by Indian women, the final note in her novels is a ray of hope. Sonya comes to Delhi with her best friend Estelle. Neha's unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life grows so strong and feels fear.

Jaishree Misra, through her heroines, shows the courage of women from their bad experiences. Instead of falling down, Neha gets back to her original self. This sexual abuse is the one important issue addressed by the author. One fine day, she finally unburdens herself to her husband, Sharat. She revealed the hidden truth about his past and introduces Sonya to him. Though a little delayed, Sharat accepts an eighteen-year-old girl who is the victim of sexual exploitation.

The uniqueness of Jaishree Misra's fiction lies in the treatment of feminine themes. All her writing is an effort to discover and convey the true significance of life. Sexual harassment and sexual violence against women is prevalent all over the world. In social and marital life, they suffer suppression, neglect and marginalisation. Here Misra tries to bring up every child with an opportunity to achieve her full potentialities. Misra portrays the exploitation of girl children and the cruelty of child exploitation as well.