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TOLERANCE AND RESISTANCE AGAINST SOCIETAL FRAME IN JAISHREE MISRA'S *ANCIENT PROMISES*

J. Martin Prabakar, Research Scholar, PG Department and Research Centre in English,
Alagappa Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi

Dr. V. Nagarajan, Associate Prof. and Head, PG Department and Research Centre in English,
Alagappa Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi

Abstract:

The writings of Jaishree Misra stand different in comparing with her contemporary writers in the way she portrays the conditions of women in the light of present society as well as in the Indian cultural context. She is a modern Indo-English Writer who was born in 1961 to a Malayali family in New Delhi. Jaishree Misra strongly states that woman can play any role in the society. Women are underestimated by her softness. But, by nature, she is both meek and bold, active and passive, tolerance and sufferance, and exploited and exploded. The Protagonist, woman that Misra penned is the conglomeration of all these qualities. Her women are naturally permissive attitude towards domestic life. By testing of her feminine qualities she is coerced to explode the social frame constructed mainly by male counter folks. Misra shows through her characters that woman also like other beings. She too has feelings, pains, commitments and sentiments. By highlighting their sufferings, she exposed the intolerable pains of women in the familial life. She states clearly that women are not exposed to the freedom which one needs in life for peaceful life. To gain the momentum in life, Misra's characters break the shackles of cultural and societal set up for women. She opines that women too have rights to take decision independently. She cannot be caged for cooking, domestic chores, care taker of mother-in-law and father-in-law. She is beyond of all these. She needs to be exposed in the society to prove her 'self'.

Key words: Domination, women's suppression, stereotype, emancipation, recognition, equality.

And thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over you- Genesis 3:16

Woman is a castrated man - Freud.

Women try to trace the self of her in walks of life. In familial life, professional life, and societal life women are conditioned by the certain frames within which they need to live. The efforts for breaking this barrier become challenge for women. As it is related with their psychology, they need to take decision meticulously. In *The Ancient Promises*, Misra sensitively portrays the conditions of Indian women. She captures their split consciousness through the characters of Janaki or Janu, who struggles to get her individuality.

Most women characters in Indo-Anglican fiction portrayed the emergence of women who stands against traditional stereotyped set ups for women. Women have to be recognized in the society as men get. Elaine Showalter said that, “.....When we free ourselves from the linear absolute of male history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition, and focus instead on the nearly visible world of female culture” (217).

Without one's 'self' surviving becomes a herculean task. Further, it leads to mental dilemma. The importance of self for women is analyzed in a great deal by Anita Desai in her fiction. The characters she established are evident for this. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Nirode and Monisha in *Voices in the City*, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Sarah in *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and

Sarla and Deven in *Custody* are all suffered under the hands of men folk. Like Anita Desai, Misra, too, has taken the themes of male domination, women's sufferings but in a different manner.

Most men forget that women too have feelings, desires and emotions. The unexposed desires within them trigger to explode violently. Feminist theory suggests that Women's "...insistence on relationship reveals not a failed adulthood, but the desire for a different one" (Abel, 10). *Ancient Promises* is a story of battle between tolerance and resistance of traditional walls. It is also war between instinct and reason.

Historical resistance has some forms, according to Ferguson, they are:

- a) Women can choose or refuse marriage as she has rights for that.
- b) she even can choose a lesbian relationship
- c) women could marry yet resist child bearing
- d) women could favour one leg of the triangle (e.g., relation to child or relation to mate) at the expense of the other
- e) women could emphasize outside kin and friendship networks with peers as a way of withholding energy, either to male mates or to mother/child bond;
- f) if economically viable, women could engage in serial monogamy and several marriages, which would tend to diminish loyalty to the mate bond and expand loyalty to the mother/ childhood. (48)

It is from this point of view *The Ancient Promises* by Jaishree Misra can be seen as a story of resistance. Janaki, the protagonist of the novel, tormented in a Kerala upper-middle class family, resisted the social constructions of motherhood. She falls in love with Arjun while attending in school. When Janaki's parents know of her relationship with Arjun, they take away her from native place Kerala and seeks groom for her immediately. They arrange a marriage by forcing her to marry Suresh. Janaki's uncle Ramama also compels her to marry Suresh. Ramama politely says to her "What's wrong? Suresh looked very nice, didn't he? I believe he's a very decent chap" (61). All of her relatives forced her to marry Suresh.

Suddenly everyone was talking again. Be grateful for what you're getting ... we are just an ordinary service family... they could get their pick of any family in Kerala... they don't even want a dowry... it's nothing less than arrogance to say no to people like them She wants to see a grandchild of her married before I die, your poor Appupa went without knowing that joy, don't do the same to me. (61-62).

Finally Janaki accepted to their wishes. Everyone in her family gets relief of by her decision. Her father, who first comes to know of her affair with Arjun, feels happy after arranging the marriage with Suresh. He feels that through this marriage he has achieved two things one is that her daughter would forget her past affair. Another thing is that he safeguards his family status intact. He never thinks about what is giving happy to her daughter.

Marriage is a patriarchal institution which helps to form the kinship networks. *The Ancient Promises* begins with Janaki's account of her husband's house. She expresses "my new family, my family's new family, the alliance they'd so wanted that now knitted us all together so indubitably (6-7)". Suresh, the spouse of Janaki, explains to her how her wife should be

- 1) She had to be pretty.
- 2) She had to be young so that she would 'adjust'.
- 3) She had to be able to speak English well, so that he could take her to Bombay in the hoped for expansion of his motel business.
- 4) Nothing else was too important. (96)

Suresh's uttering word 'adjust' indirectly means that women to tolerate the sufferings of men and domestic problems. His expectation for speaking English is clearly expressed that she is not only used for the role of wife but also as a business partner. He never mentions about love in his proposal which means that 'nothing else was too important' for him. This attitude of 'nothing else' shows his patriarchy nature.

The very next day of her marriage, Janaki encounters humiliation in her husband's home. She gets hurt

when her mother-in-law asked her whether she would like to have some tea. She replied “Yes Please” (80). Her mother-in-law advises her “look, you're not in Delhi anymore. Like it or not, you now live in Kerala, so I suggest you drop all these fashionable pleases and thank you. Here we don't believe in unnecessary style” (80). This statement comes with humor. Janaki feels hurt.

Deeply ashamed, I pushed my back as far as It would go into the wall behind me and watched her briskly make the tea. Was her displeasure because I'd spoken in English? I cast about frantically for the Malayalam to use when she gave me the tea she was making, remembering vaguely that there were no equivalent words for a casual Please and Thank You. (80)

Domestic arguments between Janaki and her mother-in-law rise every day. Though Suresh is well aware of those arguments, he never tries to rescue Janaki from the clusters of his mother. Janaki is upset over her husband's uncaring attitude on her. On realizing the fact that if her husband does not love her, nobody in the house will not love and respect her. Janaki says that she could not remember his face. This discloses his strange behavior. Though he is ten years elder to her, he never shows any concerns for her. He never protects and loves her. She is frustrated of his behavior.

As Janaki is educated, she is able to tackle the problems of the family. She adjusts her life for her existence in the family. She fulfills her husband needs. At the same time, she needs to negotiate her needs for surviving and none of the family members cares about her needs also. Most of the women bear the exploitation patiently for the family well-being. This inequality treatment fractures the psyche of the women.

Women can bear anything if her spouse shows the complete love on her. She finds Suresh spends more time on business tours rather than spending time with her. He behaves indifferent when she is humiliated by her relatives. Even though she never fails in her duty to fulfill the familial needs. She gives birth to his child. Again she is cursed for giving birth to a girl child. Moreover it is a mentally retarded child. Suresh never cares about affection mother and mentally retarded child.

....he had never been there when, as a younger bride, I had needed his friendship and guidance. He had also absented himself when Riya needed him and when we needed to face her problems together.... He had never helped me create a life myself, he had never explained to me what his business was all about, he had never looked across a crowded room at me to signal that a certain partnership existed between us. As far as I could see he preferred the company of a large scotch on the rocks to me! (248)

According to Janaki, their marriage is sham “an empty shell. A marriage that had never been” (248). She breaks the shackles and seeks what she wants. She consoles herself by caring daughter. Janaki takes her resistance to next level by upbringing her child. As a woman, Misra, has recorded her angry protest throughout the novel. She cannot tolerate the sufferings of women. Her vision incorporates the whole history of woman's role and edifies the emergence of a new woman who is true to her own self.

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