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### AIM AND SCOPE

*Crossian Resonance*, the multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed and refereed national journal launched in June 2010, strives to reach research scholars from all directions and various cross-sections of society providing a platform to resonate scientific findings. It aims to foster the spirit and aspirations of the academics and to promote a research culture among the erudite. The sustainability and success of the research journey is a step ahead in the 50<sup>th</sup> milestone of our institution playing a strategic role and nurturing the fruitful service of quality and need-based education.

This journal has provided an opportunity and space to the Crossian scholars, Professors and research guides of our institution and other institutions at national and international levels. This little, yet, vibrant reverberation of intellectual sharing will definitely generate new knowledge and ignite and unleash power to re-search within the visionary researchers.

*Crossian Resonance* strives to keep up the standard from the first issue and all the papers published in this issue were assessed by competent referee editors and were recommended for publication. This journal is committed to the development and regeneration of the nation with the scope of providing an open and common platform to launch a united vision and empowerment of innovative knowledge.

May this endeavour grow and remain evergreen like an olive tree to create renewed awareness, dimensional consciousness and enlightenment.

- Editors

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## Assertion of the Self: A Reading of Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises*

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### ABSTRACT

*Jaishree Misra weaves her novels around the axes of love, marriage and loss. As a writer, she focuses on her preoccupation with familial themes and the female perspective of family, the man-woman bonding. Moreover, the conflict between tradition and modernity finds a prominent place in the portrayal of women by Jaishree Misra. In the novel Ancient Promises, Misra portrays some of the major issues that post modernism restricts in patriarchal constructs like marriage and family. The present study deals with the situation of women who are caught up in the institution of marriage and reveals how they extricate themselves from the clutches of marital life, and enjoy their legitimate freedom.*

The institution of marriage is the central feature of all forms of human society. It is the deepest as well as the most complex of all human relationships. Marriage as an institution blooms with love and understanding, and fades with suspicion and non communication. It is bliss if there is trust and understanding, or else it is nothing more than a curse. Lack of understanding in a relationship causes innumerable problems in marital life. In India, marriage is always associated with culture and tradition. Although in a traditional society, a married woman is respected more than a spinster, she has to struggle against many social evils in a male dominated society. In South Indian families arranged marriage is a custom where parents force their daughter to marry a man against her wish. This forced marriage often leads to failure in marital life.

Jaishree Misra begins her debut novel, *Ancient Promises* with a firm statement " My marriage ended today" (3). In the novel Misra explores the sufferings and agony of an eighteen year old girl Janu, a malayali, born and brought up in Delhi who is caught up in the web of marriage with its stringent laws that govern her life. Feeling suffocated, she begins to battle for her legitimate space and freedom in the society.

Misra paints her protagonist in the broad canvas of marriage and family. She explores a single woman's predicament due to patriarchal attitudes of the old belief system, the tradition, and custom, which are still prevalent in various parts of our country. Janu is forced by her filial ties into marriage. She is compelled to sacrifice her teenage love for the sake of her family. Like all mothers, Janu's mother too wants her daughter to be married into a good family. She is a typical woman who follows the customs of the Hindu tradition. She tells Janu, "The reputations of families were carried on the shoulders of their daughters" (46-47). Thus, it clearly shows how women are responsible for keeping the family from falling apart.

'Conditioning' plays a vital role in patriarchal society. For instance, Indian mothers are conditioned by patriarchy and various social taboos. For them, maintaining a relationship matters more and they teach their daughters to endure and continue a relationship by virtue of self sacrifice. This is clearly evident in this novel through Janu's mother. Janu accepted the fact that marriage is the only goal to be obtained in life. She enters a new life with a business man Suresh. With many expectations, Janu starts her marital life, but it seems to vanish

because Suresh fails to provide Janu any physical, moral or emotional support. He himself is merely shuttling between the office and the verandah in the house where business matters are discussed and where women are not expected to be present. Through Suresh's family, Misra explores the patriarchal system that is prevailing in rich traditional families. The maraar women are educated, but they are not expected to go for jobs. Money is provided by the man if they are in need.

Janu feels totally alienated and lonely in this environment. She is muted in her in-law's house and is not allowed to express herself. Though silenced, she tries her best to be in the good books of every member in the family. She accepts the betrayal of her in-laws. This shows the pathetic condition of a married woman, who has to endure the pain of her marital life because of the society and circumstances. Later Janu delves into a self examination to probe, how and why her marriage failed. Even after a year, Janu feels that she does not belong to a maraar family, but she never gives up her hope of reconstructing her marriage that is on the rocks. She thinks that motherhood will change her unfavourable condition in marital life, but it too fails. She gives birth to a challenged baby.

Now Janu's life seems to be dark. She is unable to accept the state of her child. Like a typical Indian woman, she thinks that she might have done some wrong deeds in her previous birth, so that karma follows her as a punishment. Later Janu plans to get away from the marital bond. Like Cindrella, Janu is a figure of abandonment and abuse who is in search of self-worth. The real self or her natural worth is totally denied to her. Marriage turns out to be a trap which negates Janu's rights to individuality, independence and self realization. She has to pretend and act out the role of a happy woman.

Marriage also plays an essential component of womanhood, but unfortunately it becomes a weapon in the life of some women, dominate them and destroy them emotionally and psychologically. She also loses her liberty under the institution of marriage. The traditional concept of marriage in patriarchal society makes a woman a helpless creature, a deprived soul, unaware of her own existence, her own desires. By this indifference, she should not feel powerless, she has to rise up and try to lead an independent life. Janu uses education as a tool not only for escapism, but also to get freedom. She has to make attempts to escape from oppression by living in solitude, so she decides to go to England to do her higher studies, where she can also take care of Riya in a better way. Through education, she can emerge as a new woman with the new self.

Janu decides to come out of the stifling bondage by opting for divorce. Though divorce gives relief from painful marriage life, it is hardly enough to re-establish the woman socially, psychologically or financially. Every woman after divorce seeks for peace, freedom and independence. With new freedom and courage Janu is ready to face her future responsibilities. She regains her identity the moment she decides to quit her marital entrapment and shatters the myth of female passivity. This symbolizes Janu as the modern progressive Indian woman.

Misra clearly portrays how the self is lost right from the day of the wedding ceremony. Life does not come to an end after a broken marriage, it has to go on. The reason for women's oppression is that they have a fixed mindset about marriage and also have not

freed themselves from mythology and orthodoxy. Women in India mostly feel like Sylvia Plath, who says, "Being born a woman is my awful tragedy." (qtd. in Sinha).

Violence against women is on the rise in the contemporary Indian society and women are more and more victimized by sexism, not only of the family, but also religion, state, law and media. So today, women have to battle against the customs, which suppress their independence. Women need confidence and courage to face life. Education becomes a very important tool to empower woman. Every woman should get proper education and has to empower herself. Women empowerment is the vital tool for advancing development in the country.

Today, women have forayed into all the projections of technology, finance and industry to prove that they can take an equal responsibility with men for national progress. Socially, all outdated customs and tradition, which demean, reject or devalue woman, as a human being should be abolished. Woman should realize, she is not the victim of marriage. She should be bold enough to face the challenges of life. Today every woman should recognize the achievement of other women who have made transformative changes in society to support women's empowerment. It is an indisputable fact that the real power of women should emanate from their homes.

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