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ONE DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR

ON

DISABILITY, REPRESENTATION AND LITERATURE

held on 03 October 2019 and Organised by P.G. & Research Department
of English

S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



From Impairment To Endowment: An Analysis On Jaishree Misra's

Ancient Promises

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ABSTRACT

Disability literature focuses on the life of disabled individuals who dwells with their physical or psychological disability as well as the society which considers their inability as a cause of evil or karma. Representation of disabled characters along with normal characters was there in literature from ancient literature itself. But disability studies marked its space during the later half of the twentieth century. Now disability literature extends its studies to physical, emotional, social and mental disabilities. Jaishree Misra, one of the famous Indian English Writer known for her feministic themes has also dealt with the theme of disability. Misra in her debut novel *Ancient Promises*, throws light on the difficulties and struggles faced by a young mother with a disabled girl child in a society in which womanhood itself is being considered as a disability. She tries to juxtapose various prejudices and stereotypes which arise in front of disabled people, especially in front of disabled children and their lovable parents through the life of Janaki and her mentally handicapped daughter Riya. The gendered disability of her daughter, and the prejudices and stereotypes she faces disturbs the heroine Janaki's mind like a typical Indian mother with disabled child. But because of her motherly affection and the strong bond with her child, she overcomes all these problems and tries to provide a new acceptable life to Riya.

Keywords:

Mental disability, gender disability, female empowerment

Oxford English Dictionary defines the word disability and its cognates in three various ways. First in legal sense means hinder or restrain. Secondly in medical sense it means a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses or activities.



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Thirdly in a conceptual sense means rendered incapable of action or use. Disability studies examine the cause and effect of disability. It analyzes the disability in history, theory, legislation, policy, ethics and the arts. Disability studies emerged during 1980s in UK, US and Canada. In 2005, the Modern Language Association established disability as a division of study.

Gender and disability becomes major themes in Jaishree Misra's autobiographical novel *Ancient Promises* as she came from a society in which women are termed as disabled because of their gender. In the entire novel Mishra portrays how women are being impaired in the society though she doesn't have any physical or mental disability in medical sense. In a typical society like Kerala, women are asked to be dumb, deaf, blind and lame footed though they can speak, hear, see and walk and Misra openly portrays it as a born Keralite.

Throughout the novel, deliberate efforts were taken by the society and family to silent Janu. From the day of marriage negotiations to till the day of divorce, Janu is forced to be silent. Janu's apprehensions over over the termination of her studies are silenced by her mother: "Why? So that you can waste more of your father's hard-earned money pretending to go to college while roaming all around town with boys?" (54). She acts as dumb in front of her father's decision to forsake Arjun and to become a part of arranged marriage. She never tries to make any argument, but silently accepts it like a disabled girl.

The adverse condition of Maaraar family also makes her a more disabled woman. Though brought up in Delhi, she was forced to wear sari and to do all the kitchen works along with lot of restrictions. Suresh, her husband never tried to interfere in the problems of Janu with his challenging mother and daughters. Though Janu tried to be an ideal typical wife. Janu craves to give birth to a male child in order to get the approval of Maaraar family. In Indian culture, a woman who is not able to give birth to male child was considered as disabled as well as evil or ill omen. Nowadays they consider women as liability.

The birth of Riya became a great blow to Janu. Maaraar family considered that the mentally handicapped girl like Riya will become a stigma to their status. They preferred to keep her with a servant and do not want to take her to the public realm like many other



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Indians who tries to avoid disabled people from their group and society. Janu offers rest of her life as a struggle to eradicate the social stigma on disability and makes attempts to empower her child. Janu realizes that,

But a child like Riya, left unloved, would simply wither and perish.

Couldn't they see that her kind of innocence could only understand love and not the lack of it? My own rights had not seemed worth fighting for, but Riya needed me to be her voice and a battle on her behalf would be far more satisfying. I was soon going to become the thorn in the Maraar side (132-133).

Having a disabled child is often accepted as the result of karma and therefore Janu is also portrayed as vice because of disabled daughter. She was forced to face tortures and physical harassments due to this.

Disabled women has to face dual discrimination for their inability and gender. The parents of disabled young girls are overprotective and consider them as doubly vulnerable. Janu, in the novel understands the loneliness of Riya in the normal world and this realization eventually gives her to overcome all the haphazards and to overthrow the the dull and cloistered existence in Maraar house. Though Suresh has some affection towards his child Riya, he is very conscious that he can make no sense of the future of such a girl.

Janu strongly fought for the custodian of Riya as she is well aware that nobody will do justice to Riya's disability. Janu never tried to escape from the world of disability. On the otherhand, she fought with it and achieved success in the case of Riya and herself. By securing a degree in special education, she extended her concern towards Riya and for those who are in the same situation like Riya.

In the novel, Janu breaks both the physical and mental coffins of Maraar family. Her journey to Delhi and then to London from Maraar family shows her upliftment from impairment to endowment. She started to live according to her wish and began to speak whenever she wants. Also she gives musical therapy and caring to Riya in order to give her strength. She becomes the representation of women who finds ability from diability.

Work Cited



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