

# Fractured Selves: Identity Crisis and Alienation in Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises*

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**Abstract**—This paper aims to analyze the connections between identity crisis and alienation in Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises*. It is an autobiographical novel, where the author narrates the life of the protagonist, Janaki. The literary theories utilized for this analysis are feminism, postcolonial theory, and psychoanalytical theory. This paper aims to highlight the underlying connection between Janaki's struggle and her identity crisis. Further, the paper discusses how her identity is shattered due to the suppression and oppression faced by her in the family, marriage, and the society. Through the readings of the theorists Julia Kristeva, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, it was analyzed that Janaki's trauma, social alienation, and feelings of dislocation are a result of her oppressed gendered body and an experience of cultural loss. By applying the theory of Kristeva's abjection, it was revealed that Janaki's abjection and feelings of ambivalence are responsible for the identity crisis. Through the use of the theory of the subaltern by Spivak, it was shown how Janaki's early silence is caused by the patriarchy in her society. Bhabha's concept of hybridity shows the ambiguity of Janaki's experience of diaspora in England. It can be concluded that although the struggle for Janaki's identity was not as loud as the writers who do not oppose the structures that oppress them, her voice of agency becomes a form of strength and resistance.

**Index Terms**—identity crisis, alienation, postcolonialism, psychological trauma, patriarchal oppression

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE BURDEN OF BELONGING AND THE FRACTURED SELF

The contemporary Indian English literary scene includes Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* as a moving story about female identity that navigates through traditional cultural demands and modern ambitions while showcasing emotional strength. The novel, which appeared in 2000 combines autobiographical elements to tell the story of Janaki or Janu, a young Malayali woman who fights for self-identity and freedom while living in a traditional patriarchal society. The first-person narrative provides a deeply introspective view of the protagonist's evolution from adolescence to adulthood while transitioning from submission to subtle defiance and ultimately reclaiming selfhood after experiencing alienation (Vimal & Pillai, 2024).

Readers find *Ancient Promises* compelling because it weaves a personal narrative with social commentary. Janu faces conflicting cultural expectations regarding womanhood and duty as she moves between Kerala, Delhi, and London. The protagonist faces a continuous identity crisis because she has no control over her emotions while also lacking her own personal voice. Her journey demonstrates a crisis of being which Erik Erikson defines as identity formation struggles between roles, expectations and self-definition (Erikson, 1968). Janu's identity crisis differs from Erikson's Western model because she faces added challenges from collective history as well as gender expectations and cultural remembrance which make her alienation both psychological and sociocultural.

Janu faces early-life alienation when she experiences sudden separation from Arjun because of caste and community pressures. The Nair family insists on traditional values and social status, which makes them arrange for her marriage to Suresh, a wealthy businessman from Kerala. Her emotional stability first takes a hit from both her separation from her youthful romance and her move to an unknown city. She tries to fulfil her duties as a wife yet her marriage confines her in a loveless relationship where her needs remain neglected, while her presence stays insignificant. Her existence within Suresh's household deepens her silence under her mother-in-law's watchful eye which strengthens the cultural demands for women's obedience and emotional self-denial.

Through multiple theoretical approaches this research examines the relationship between identity crisis and alienation in the literary work *Ancient Promises*. The analysis of Janaki's identity formation through patriarchal observation benefits from the feminist perspectives of thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that women develop their identity through social construction, which cultivates passivity and sacrifice as central tenets of femininity (Beauvoir, 1949). Janaki's development throughout her life illustrates her transformation into womanhood through her upbringing, her coerced marriage and subsequent difficulties with motherhood and self-determination which resulted in the loss of personal liberty and complete emotional well-being.

Janaki's experience demonstrates Homi K. Bhabha's idea of "unhomeliness" from a postcolonial perspective because her cultural displacement alongside hybrid identities creates a dual crisis regarding her sense of place and identity. Janaki

traverses social and geographic spaces between Kerala, Delhi and the UK, which expose her to distinct sets of societal expectations despite not being a conventional postcolonial migrant. According to Bhabha the condition of unhomeliness emerges when "the boundaries between home and the outside world blur," resulting in a disrupted and divided sense of identity (Bhabha, 1994). Janaki's feeling of being unhomed starts inside her marital house yet spreads through her global journeys showing how her sense of identity faces disruption through both close proximity and physical distance.

The narrative structure of the novel strengthens the characters' psychological and emotional detachment. Janaki spent her formative years in Delhi as a compliant daughter in a traditional Nair family where others dictated her decisions. When Janaki unexpectedly marries Suresh she enters an oppressive relationship that strips her of her voice and prevents her from finding companionship and emotional satisfaction. Her efforts to meet societal expectations result in growing isolation and hopelessness while she manages to care for her differently abled daughter Riya without any help from her family or spouse. Moving to Delhi increases Janaki's sense of alienation because her family limits her freedom of movement while denying her personal wishes.

The narrative makes alienation a dominant theme through Janaki's psychological isolation and her emotional detachment from her nearest relationships. The combination of her silent struggle in an unfulfilling marriage and her inability to care for her disabled daughter Riya alongside her cultural displacement in Western society indicates a profound existential crisis. Within *Ancient Promises*, alienation reflects Karl Marx's theory of being separated from one's true nature through oppressive forces except here these forces are family, culture, and gender-based instead of economic.

Julia Kristeva's notion of the "abject" represents elements that society excludes or suppresses during identity development. In "Powers of Horror" (1980) Kristeva defines the abject as that which disrupts identity structures as well as systems and orders because it operates outside established boundaries and rules. Janaki's personal desires along with her emotional requirements and romantic aspirations become unacceptable so that social stability and family reputation can be maintained. The expectation exists for her to stay within accepted womanhood boundaries as a dutiful wife and obedient daughter while sacrificing herself as a mother although these roles damage her identity.

Janaki's narrative stands as a testament of resilience rather than total defeat. Janaki demonstrates agency when she revives her relationship with Arjun and chooses to pursue higher education in England over her existing marriage. These pivotal moments question traditional female sacrifice narratives by showcasing a woman's journey toward achieving personal and intellectual independence. Her relocation to London becomes a pivotal moment when she learns to defend her legal and maternal rights while fighting for her daughter's custody and reestablishing her narrative voice despite facing numerous obstacles. Her UK education and independent lifestyle enable her to rebuild her fragmented identity and author her own life story.

*Ancient Promises* stands out as a powerful text because it depicts Janaki's alienation as a process of slow retreat with intermittent episodes of insight and defiance rather than brave rebellion. Instead of leaving her marriage angrily or dramatically refusing her responsibilities, she takes considered actions by relocating to England and pursuing custody battles and writing her story as expressions of self-empowerment. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism" describes this pathway as the temporary creation of a unified identity by the subaltern woman which enables her to achieve agency and voice (Spivak, 1988). Janaki remains silenced throughout most of the novel but eventually finds her voice through the narrative which turns her story into an empowering act of reclamation.

The novel functions as both a product of female self-expression and a platform for examining identity politics and the experience of alienation. The personal elements of *Ancient Promises* demonstrate political significance through gender issues as well as language dynamics and geographical and memory-related themes. The act of writing functions as a survival tool and a form of resistance that aligns with feminist demands to reintegrate female subjectivity into literary spaces. By using storytelling as her final act Janaki establishes her selfhood while disrupting the patriarchal narrative that previously dictated her existence. *Ancient Promises* extends beyond personal endurance to become a multifaceted examination of identity reconstruction within the interplay between personal experiences and political forces.

## II. FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS AND THE LOSS OF SUBJECTIVITY

Janaki's identity crisis develops from her early experiences growing up in the societal framework of a Malayali upper-middle-class family. As a child Janaki internalizes strict norms of behavior which enforce silence and submission to create what society sees as the perfect woman. While many view the family as a place of emotional closeness, it functions as a disciplinary body that upholds patriarchal standards and restricts personal subjectivity development. The insights that Simone de Beauvoir presents in *The Second Sex* prove especially revealing in this context. According to her analysis society presents marriage as the traditional destiny for women and defines their life through their connection to a man. A patriarchal system determines Janaki's identity before she even has the chance to make her own choices while rendering her desires insignificant.

The narrative initially defines Janaki as a daughter who abides by expectations from the start. The period Janaki spent exploring personal freedom during her schooldays in Delhi through her developing relationship with Arjun represents a threat to her family's cultural values rather than an opportunity for self-discovery. Her family in Kerala sees her formative emotional connection as crossing established cultural boundaries. The family stops her independence by forcing her into marriage with Suresh whom they selected because he shares their traditional beliefs. This act goes beyond forcing a marriage because it eliminates Janaki's emotional identity. The family operates as an ideological system that suppresses

opposition and destroys developing individuality. Spivak's epistemic violence theory applies to this situation because she maintains that women in colonial and postcolonial settings are frequently represented by others instead of being permitted to express themselves. Janaki's personal choices become secondary to a family-determined narrative which enforces cultural traditions and collective honor.

Psychological violence persists when Janaki begins her new life in her marital home. The Marar household fails to offer emotional stability or belonging but instead becomes a place where cultural displacement occurs and identities disappear. The new family dictates Janaki's life through their established rules of behavior and prohibitions. The family immediately labels her an outsider because she grew up in Delhi and demands that she follow their cultural expectations. The mother-in-law assumes the role of an oppressor by implementing various controlling measures that attempt to mold Janaki's self into the family's strict cultural framework.

Her transformation starts symbolically during her wedding reception when her individuality is forcefully altered to fit her in-laws' expectations. As Janaki narrates:

I was helped by Sathi and an aunty in looking like someone else. A plait of hair had been bought ... and was firmly attached to my shoulder-length Delhi tresses. A thick layer of eye liner was painted around my lashes ... By the time I had worn Sathi's jewellery and the brand new Kanjeevaram sari that had been for me, I was somebody else. (Misra, 2000, p. 92)

The event represents more than an alteration of clothing but signifies an enforced entry into a performative feminine existence dictated by others. The fake hair along with heavy eyeliner and foreign jewelry represents the start of a life dedicated to seeking external validation. Her original self has been completely replaced by an artificial identity. This performative transformation demonstrates Judith Butler's concept of gender which is constructed through the performance of repeated social actions. Janaki is pushed into a false identity that matches traditional Marar ideals of womanhood. From the start her compliance becomes a requirement which signals her initial step towards becoming erased as an autonomous individual.

Through Julia Kristeva's framework of the abject one finds an insightful way to interpret this transformation. Kristeva in "Powers of Horror" defines abjection as elements which disrupt identity and systems and must be rejected to maintain societal symbolic structures (Kristeva, 1982). In her new household Janaki transforms into an abject figure following her marriage. The stability of the household deems her emotions and desires as threats which require suppression of her personal identity. The household requires her to fulfill family obligations but expects her emotional experiences to stay concealed. The structure of the family requires her disappearance even though it depends on her emotional and physical contributions.

Marriage fails to deliver emotional stability or a sense of belonging for Janaki. Her marriage initiates a profound separation from her own psychological and emotional well-being. The theory of abjection formulated by Julia Kristeva provides an insightful perspective for analyzing this transformation. Kristeva defines abjection in "Powers of Horror" as elements that disrupt identity and order which society must reject to maintain its symbolic framework (Kristeva, 1982). After her marriage Janaki takes on the role of an abject presence in her new family. The family unit perceives her feelings and personal identity as threats to domestic stability which necessitates their suppression. Her existence fulfills essential family functions but her private thoughts must stay concealed and unexpressed. The household's symbolic code requires her disappearance while depending on her physical and emotional work.

Janaki finds herself trapped within her marriage instead of experiencing companionship. Suresh her husband does not engage emotionally and shows scant interest in her mental or emotional experiences. Her in-laws maintain continuous oversight of her actions which strengthens their expectation that she must stay quiet and obedient. For Janaki the home transforms from a place of closeness into an environment of scrutiny and control. Whenever Janaki tries to establish emotional bonds or express discontent she encounters apathetic reactions or gentle reprimands which deepen her internalized feelings of inadequacy. Within marriage exists an emotional void that Betty Friedan identified as "the problem that has no name," which describes the silent despair women endure from domestic demands and emotional neglect (Friedan, 1963). Janaki's distress extends beyond her individual misery to represent a broader silencing of her emotional and intellectual needs by systemic forces.

Janaki's inability to express her trauma demonstrates the unavoidable nature of this silencing. Her reality becomes trapped by inexpressibility because language fails to represent her experience. The analysis of Luce Irigaray about the male-centered power structure becomes significant in this context. Irigaray explains in "This Sex Which Is Not One" how language's symbolic system excludes female desire by structuring itself to invalidate it. According to her argument women experience multiple identities which patriarchy simplifies into a single reductive form (Irigaray, 1977). Janaki's inner voice resists societal demands for a single identity but cannot find a family or social environment where she can express it meaningfully. Her internal world becomes distinct from the external roles society demands from her.

Janaki's emotional and psychological collapse transforms her into a ghostly presence living in her matrimonial home. She exists as a ghost in her own life because she appears only through her obedience while remaining detached from authentic involvement with her personal aspirations. The struggle between her responsibilities to her family and her own desires creates fractures in her sense of self. The process becomes clearer through Louis Althusser's interpellation concept which defines how ideological structures like the family summon individuals into predefined roles (Althusser, 1971).

Through her performance of daughter-in-law, wife, and mother roles Janaki becomes interpellated into these positions which causes her to give up her genuine self.

Yet, this erasure is not absolute. Janaki maintains memories and emotions and holds aspirations that remain uncontained during her marriage's quietest moments. Despite her inner world being suppressed Janaki's memories and narrative creation enable its active reconstruction. The concealed nucleus of resistance demonstrates that identity endures beyond its fragmented and estranged state. Though family and marital institutions try to define her identity Janaki uses her developing self-awareness to break free from these limitations which sets the stage for her subsequent rebellious actions.

Janaki experiences deep alienation because her family expects her to uphold their honor while she faces strict gender norms as a young woman in a traditional environment. Her ability to make important life choices remains restricted by others who decide whom she marries and where she lives along with how she raises her daughter Riya. The legal and societal barriers which prevent her from shielding her daughter amplify Janaki's sense of loss and helplessness. Her return to Delhi that emerges later in the story together with her quest for higher education and her final attempt to regain custody of Riya stems from this early experience of family domination.

The narrative shows Janaki evolving from her role as a daughter into an existence that no longer fits within her personal life. Janaki experiences emotional and symbolic alienation at psychological levels that stem from family demands to erase her ability to speak and feel. The home that ought to represent a place of belonging instead transforms into a space of alienation. The family imposes silence on her voice while dismissing her desires and reshaping her identity to support family honor and social norms. Throughout the narrative development these internal struggles emerge through minor yet impactful resistant behaviors which indicate a potential for self-reclamation outside patriarchal domestic boundaries.

### III. MARITAL ALIENATION AND THE FAILURE OF INTIMACY

Following her marriage Janaki experiences increased emotional and psychological isolation which builds upon the silencing she underwent in her birth family. Janaki's entry into the Marar family preserves patriarchal authority within their wealthy Malayali household through the institution of marriage which society recognizes as acceptable. Though Janaki married Suresh without fully agreeing to it herself the actual experience of being his wife causes her to become more estranged from who she really is. What could have been an environment for emotional intimacy and shared life transforms into a sophisticated mechanism for control.

Suresh never becomes physically violent or displays obvious abusive behavior toward his wife. His lack of emotional connection, combined with passive disinterest creates a subtle yet effective abandonment. He seldom demonstrates any interest in understanding Janaki's thoughts and aspirations or exploring her emotions. The breakdown of emotional intimacy emerges as one of the subtlest ways to create alienation. Janaki loses her own identity as she performs femininity through obedience and silence while functioning domestically for the Marar family as both wife and daughter-in-law.

The Marar household stands as an example of "controlled respectability" because the family maintains its social prestige and cultural sophistication through an implicit rule of silence, conformity and suppression of emotions. Janaki faces persistent evaluation from her mother-in-law and relatives based not on her personal identity but solely on her ability to meet their pre-established standards. The birth of her daughter Riya does nothing to alleviate Janaki's emotional austerity. Society reduces her existence to the mere roles of wife and mother while completely ignoring her individual thoughts and intellectual desires. When Janaki feels sad or resists she faces rejection because others view her behavior as childish or as betrayal.

Janaki's suffering at the Marar home remains non-dramatic and free from violent displays. A lack of attention leads to this emotional pain which is intensified by the continuous rejection of emotional share and deeper human bonds. Her own life becomes a silent shadow where she exists without voice. Janaki functions as a ritual performer and domestic order facilitator who passes on lineage yet lacks recognition as a sentient being with thoughts and emotions. People misunderstand her silence while her words consistently lack significance. Her desires and personal identity remain unexplored because she receives no questions about them. Her existence becomes dependent upon external expectations that dictate how she should be.

The situation described correlates with Jean-Paul Sartre's existential theory of being-for-others because the self emerges through external perceptions that define and limit it (Sartre, 2003). Within the Marar family Janaki remains known solely as a daughter-in-law, a mother, and a wife while her individual identity remains unrecognized. Her emotional and psychological reality is denied. A totalizing expectation of compliance rather than violence enforces her silence. Janaki's life now revolves around duty instead of desire while coexistence stands in place of genuine connection.

Janaki's marriage displays a profound emotional emptiness that reflects broader patriarchal systems which normalize male emotional distance while making women responsible for carrying emotional tasks. Suresh's failure represents both his own personal shortcomings and a wider systemic issue of failing to acknowledge women as emotional entities. His refusal to engage emotionally represents a thousand denials—of love and understanding as well as observation and connection. He becomes the very symbol of marital alienation: This spouse exists in the physical space while lacking emotional connection.

Nancy Chodorow's feminist psychoanalytic theories reveal that domestic settings reinforce gender roles which leave women isolated on an emotional level. The writings of Nancy Chodorow indicate that women become accustomed to

self-sacrificing behaviors through their experiences in motherhood and marital relationships (Chodorow, 1978). Janaki's value within the Marar family depends entirely upon her adherence to prescribed domestic roles. Family surveillance and control limit her emotional relationship with her daughter Riya. The scrutiny she faces toward her maternal behaviors turns her into a practical entity instead of allowing her emotional independence.

Janaki experiences intensified alienation due to her displacement from her cultural roots. Her experiences growing up in Delhi have deeply influenced her worldview, language ability and self-awareness despite her Malayali heritage. Her Kerala marriage homecoming becomes a forced cultural exile rather than a heartfelt return. The unspoken behavioral codes along with linguistic barriers and rigid customs of her new setting create challenges for her. Her sense of unbelonging intensifies because of the Marar family's strict cultural norms. Her ability to speak two languages coupled with her contemporary views and emotional transparency encounters skepticism and even contempt. She experiences cultural exclusion in the place that should represent her own home.

Janaki's crisis is rooted in this double dislocation: Janaki encountered alienation first through a natal family who taught her silence and then through a marital family which required her to disappear. Janaki's identity in both her parental home and marital home depends on her ability to conform to pre-established gender roles rather than her actual self. The extended experience of alienation creates devastating psychological damage. Her sense of self slowly disappears as she constantly conforms to imposed standards.

Yet, *Ancient Promises* also gestures toward resistance. Janaki's alienation is profound, but not total. Janaki preserves her internal world which holds memories, reflective thoughts and postponed wishes. Her unwritten letters to Arjun and acts of quiet rebellion alongside her undying love for Riya demonstrate her enduring self despite suffering damage. Each small act of inner resilience becomes a seed that will eventually grow into transformation. Janaki's departure from the Marar home represents a culmination of her journey towards reclaiming her suppressed identity.

*Ancient Promises* examines how patriarchal family systems impose emotional burdens while enforcing silence becomes a form of quiet brutality through Janaki's story. The text demonstrates that domestic spaces can erase individuality while marriages lacking mutual recognition exacerbate feelings of isolation. Through Janaki's experience we learn that oppression exists beyond physical violence. This type of oppression presents itself through detached caregiving, impersonal presence, and obligatory actions that lack love. The human spirit keeps its power to resist and remember throughout silence before finding a way to speak.

#### IV. JANAKI'S ASSERTION OF IDENTITY

In Jaishree Misra's *Ancient Promises* Janaki's transformation follows a strong feminist narrative arc that progresses from enforced silence into conscious self-expression. The story follows her transformation from a girl trapped by upper-middle-class Malayali domestic expectations into a woman who masters her personal destiny. This development represents both an individual transformation and a powerful critique of societal structures such as family, marriage, and patriarchy which aim to limit female independence. Misra offers a layered emotional study of feminine identity formation and reclamation through cycles of shaping and erosion. Through stages of sorrow and resistance Janaki achieves reconstitution which serves as an emblematic representation of numerous women who fight to establish their identity against a world that tries to dictate their existence.

The novel opens with Janaki depicted as both emotionally alienated and intellectually suppressed. The arranged marriage to Suresh which her family sanctioned as a respectable union represents the initial major attempt to silence her personal voice. Society presents marriage as women's ultimate achievement but Janaki experiences its hidden oppressive dynamics through her life in the Marar household. Janaki's existence as a wife demands nothing more than silent obedience. Janaki experiences no emotional closeness with Suresh while her personal needs and opinions remain unseen and ignored. The Marar family follows strict patriarchal standards to maintain control over all aspects of her existence which eliminates her independence and forces her into a passive life role.

Janaki's early existence mirrors the societal patriarchal teachings that tell women suffering is an expected part of life. The way she initially tolerates emotional neglect and social limitations demonstrates how internalized patriarchal values can mask awareness of unfair treatment. The narrative takes a new direction when Janaki starts to doubt the validity of her suffering. The subtle yet profound awakening marks a transformative shift in consciousness which reflects feminist theory's idea of making personal experiences political. When Janaki understands that her distress stems from systemic oppression rather than individual failure she starts analyzing her life with a critical perspective.

The practice of re-framing Janaki's life experiences mirrors Paulo Freire's idea of *conscientização* which he details in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." According to Freire true liberation occurs when oppressed people understand oppressive systems through intellectual engagement (Freire, 2000). The moment when Janaki re-engages with education becomes crucial to the storyline. After facing barriers to her educational pursuits, she starts to view education as a path to freedom beyond just securing a job. Her choice to persist with her studies stands as a radical expression of self-empowerment against family opposition and logistical obstacles. Education, here, is more than institutional. Her journey of education represents her intellectual and emotional rebirth.

Janaki discovers a unique opportunity for liberation while attending university. At this place she finds her way back to language and literature while rediscovering her own identity. Janaki's pursuit of learning enables her to regain her ability to think independently as well as to experience emotions fully and express herself freely. Within the university Janaki

discovers a place of resistance which enables her subjectivity to develop beyond the roles imposed upon her. Through literature Janaki discovers new ways to understand her existence and express her inner world which she was previously unable to reveal. The new space stands as an opposition to the silence imposed on her during her marriage as she starts to evolve into someone who thinks, feels, and speaks.

Janaki uses her memory as a crucial tool in reclaiming her identity. At first Janaki remembers Arjun with feelings of loss and longing but later transforms his memory into a symbolic act of resistance. Arjun embodies the period when Janaki possessed both self-determination and genuine emotional awareness. The painful memory of their relationship serves as a connection to her earlier self who knew freedom and serves as evidence that she was once able to love and make choices. Recalling these memories constitutes more than looking back with nostalgia because it represents a powerful reclaiming of her own historical narrative. Janaki restores her identity from her past memories which were lost or hidden by her responsibilities as wife and daughter-in-law.

The theory of identity performance proposed by Judith Butler finds a strong parallel in Janaki's journey towards self-reclamation because it describes identity as non-static and dependent on continuous performative acts (Butler, 1990). Janaki does not rediscover an original or truthful identity but instead creates a new sense of self through acts of resistance and reflection alongside repeated behaviors. Through her acts of rejecting conformity along with her dedication to learning and defending her daughter she reconstructs her identity. She is not simply regaining her previous self but rather she is actively shaping her new identity.

Janaki's motherhood identity expands through her relationship with her developmentally challenged daughter Riya while she faces patriarchal oppression. The Marar family punishes Janaki through patriarchal revenge by keeping Riya away from her after Janaki departs from their home. The institution of motherhood which society idealizes as a natural and unconditional duty becomes a tool of punishment and shame for a woman who decides to end her marriage. Janaki fights for Riya's custody through ongoing legal and emotional challenges which symbolize her defiance of the punishment she faces. By standing up for her daughter she defends her maternal rights while also protecting her personal dignity and ensuring her voice and place in the world remain secure. The maternal bond transforms into a wellspring of profound emotional strength and moral clarity rather than serving as a limitation.

Her return to Delhi represents an intentional move to enter a space where she gains control to tell her own story. Janaki starts her writing journey here which transforms into her most powerful expression of self and resistance. "Through its narrative structure *Ancient Promises* transforms into a metafictional work. The existence of Janaki's story within the novel reflects how the novel itself becomes her story. Her decision to narrate her personal history allows her to gain control over her experiences through which she transforms trauma into testimony. According to poststructuralist thought Michel Foucault proposed that power and knowledge interact so those who control language to define their reality can transform that reality (Foucault, 1980). Janaki's self-knowledge becomes her power. Her narrative becomes a space of liberation.

Hélène Cixous calls for women to inscribe their physical and personal experiences into historical records as a way to oppose the silence enforced upon them by patriarchal systems (Cixous, 1976). Through her writing Janaki performs an act of resistance against historical erasure. The combination of pain and loss with hope and courage gives her voice the power to create an entirely new space for defining herself radically. She maintains the legitimacy of her struggle through the power of her voice despite lacking a full resolution. She acknowledges her resilience amid adversity while asserting her entitlement to express herself and to make her own decisions. The act of her narrative control stands as the strongest opposition to those systems which tried to erase her voice.

The novel's conclusion reveals that Janaki does not achieve conventional triumph. Janaki faces an uncertain future while her past wounds persist. However, her position has irrevocably changed. She has decided to exist autonomously without waiting for external approval. She has moved away from fulfilling others' expectations to taking control of her own life. Janaki's final condition is accurately represented by Stuart Hall's idea that identity remains ever-changing and unending (Hall, 1990). Janaki remains a dynamic work in progress that embodies open-ended growth along with reflective awareness and assertiveness.

The novel concludes with a gesture that embodies both quiet dignity and deep strength. Janaki's evolution diverges from traditional story resolutions yet provides profound affirmation. She now controls her life narrative which was previously dictated by others. Her sense of alienation serves as the foundational ground for developing her identity. Her crisis, once immobilizing, becomes her curriculum. Janaki regains control of her life when she finds her voice again. *Ancient Promises* stands as both a narrative about personal struggle and a feminist work that redefines a woman's self-discovery process in opposition to the forces seeking to dismantle her.

## V. CONCLUSION

In *Ancient Promises*, Jaishree Misra illustrates how individual identity undergoes transformation through socio-cultural and familial frameworks as well as emotional pressures. The narrative of Janaki extends beyond the confines of an arranged marriage story and transcends simple critiques of traditional domestic roles. The text serves as an intricate study of identity reconstruction which occurs through the interaction of resistance and alienation. Her journey reveals that identity is not a static entity but an ongoing negotiation influenced by power dynamics alongside memory and desire.

The novel fundamentally examines the various strategies patriarchal systems use to suppress and remove women's expressions. The alienation Janaki experiences develops through repeated silences and erasures combined with numerous small daily humiliations rather than a single event. The everyday traumas found within family institutions and the expectations of marriage and motherhood create a widespread cultural system that blocks women from expressing their personal thoughts. Tradition and duty impose an inescapable burden that determines her life while making her a passive vessel for other people's choices. The narrative demonstrates that personal identity survives within the novel's restrictive frameworks.

The first-person storytelling in *Ancient Promises* enables Janaki to repossess her narrative. Narration serves as a vehicle for resistance through which she disrupts the enforced silence from her past experiences. She transforms her previously silenced voice into a place for healing and rebuilding. According to Hélène Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine*, women should create their existence through writing and express their bodily truths and personal histories in their unique language (Cixous, 1976). When Janaki chooses to tell her life story she performs a feminist act to take back her narrative. Through reinterpretation of her past experiences she gains insight from her suffering.

The book's analysis of identity becomes deeper through its depiction of cultural mixing and displacement. Janaki exists between two distinct cultural worlds as she moves between Delhi and Kerala with each place shaping her sense of self in unique ways. The story does not treat this cultural duality as mere confusion but instead examines how various cultural ties can exist simultaneously within one person despite their ongoing tension. Stuart Hall's theory that identity develops through continuous transformation rather than fixed states becomes evident in this context (Hall, 1990). Instead of reviving a fundamental or primal identity Janaki builds a fresh identity by combining her memory with her education and experiences in motherhood and storytelling. Her final identity represents a revised creation instead of a rediscovery.

Feminist literary theorists have traditionally highlighted the need to reconsider domestic spaces as areas where both suppression and defiance can occur. The experiences of her life show how domestic spaces serve as both refuge and confinement while motherhood simultaneously roots and separates a person and marriage hides intimacy instead of building it. Janaki discovers her motivation to resist within the core of these contradictions. She rejects the complete definition of her roles and steadily asserts her right to self-identify.

*Ancient Promises* separates itself from other female emancipation stories through its portrayal of liberation as neither total nor simple. Janaki's transformation is partial, painful, and ongoing. Her past wounds persist while her daughter's future continues to raise unanswered questions. The choices she makes through speaking and writing bring about such deep transformation that they rearrange the fundamental aspects of her existence. Instead of pursuing a triumphant conclusion the novel emphasizes the importance of process and struggle and the power of voice. The journey to liberation typically involves gradual self-reconstruction rather than sudden dramatic events.

Through Janaki's voice as the narrative's core element Jaishree Misra tells one woman's story while simultaneously pointing to many other untold stories that remain silent. The novel represents a venue where personal experiences and political dimensions unite and transform private moments into acts of revolution. Through this work readers experience Janaki's endurance alongside her happiness recovery and her relentless demand for recognition. *Ancient Promises* becomes part of the expanding collection of Indian women's literature that questions mainstream stories and creates opportunities for innovative literary and cultural perspectives.

Janaki's identity crisis demonstrates a social disease rather than personal weakness because society imposes rigid female roles that fail to recognize their multidimensional nature. Despite emotional neglect and silencing causing her alienation and displacement Janaki discovers within these circumstances the potential for self-invention instead of despair. Her choices to go back to Delhi for education and fight legally for her daughter demonstrate quiet yet radical rebellion that transforms her life boundaries. Her decision to initiate legal separation from Suresh despite facing enormous social stigma and personal sacrifice marks her reclaiming of personal autonomy.

The divorce Janaki initiates against Suresh represents more than just leaving a failed marriage. Janaki's divorce from Suresh serves as a political act that frees her from the system which attempted to erase her voice and identity. Her bold choice to leave behind the Marar family's predetermined life path demonstrates both heartache and bravery. The battle to obtain custody of Riya represents the emotionally intense segment of her journey that demonstrates the intricate connections between her roles as mother and woman and her sense of self. Through her fight for Riya Janaki goes beyond asserting her rights as a mother because she regains her ability to love and nurture while also seeking to make her voice heard.

The narrative's depiction of alienation stands out because it shows alienation as a platform for creating new identities while avoiding the glorification of Janaki's pain. Janaki maintains her vocal presence despite enduring emotional trauma for many years. When Janaki meets Arjun she experiences a quiet renewal through his embodiment of love alongside emotional reciprocity and respect. The novel depicts her relationship as a step in her wider journey of healing and self-reconstruction instead of the ultimate goal of her quest.

Janaki's relocation to London alongside Arjun represents both a physical relocation and a substantial inner transformation as she starts a new chapter in her life. In London Janaki finds a setting of potential which allows her to envision a life shaped through personal preference instead of societal expectations. The new environment allows her to fully regain her narrative through self-expression and independence alongside her relationships. Her decision to start over

emotionally, legally, professionally, and maternally underscores the novel's central argument: Identity emerges not from inheritance or assignment but from an often-difficult process of creation within the experiences of one's life.

The transformation from alienation to agency and from imposed silence to chosen speech demonstrates the psychoanalytic working-through process where trauma undergoes re-narration and re-understanding before it can be transcended. Through memory and retrospection Janaki uses her voice to rebuild her fractured self. *Ancient Promises* aligns with Hélène Cixous's demand in "The Laugh of the Medusa" for women to inscribe themselves into history as well as language and power structures (Cixous, 1976).

*Ancient Promises* stands as both an introspective and politically significant work while investigating female identity within the constraints of tradition, silence, and social pressure. The text reveals identity crises and alienation as social and cultural experiences etched into women's physical and mental experiences. Janaki's transformation from a mute daughter and oppressed wife into an autonomous woman, mother, and partner illustrates how resistance combined with reflective practice and narrative recovery can create powerful change. Her commitments created through silent sacrifice now echo openly as she finally speaks for her own sake. Through her actions she takes control of her own life while simultaneously establishing that women everywhere should have the freedom to tell their own stories and shape their own destinies.

Janaki's transformation stands out because it reflects the shared struggles of many women who live with family expectations and societal judgments while managing their emotional expression. Jaishree Misra creates an authentic and human narrative by depicting a central female character who defies traditional roles of both victimhood and complete liberation. Janaki's refusal to be limited to one identity as wife, daughter, mother or lover reflects feminist demands for intersectional and diverse portrayals of women in literary works.

The novel rejects simplistic fantasies of liberation in favor of a more nuanced exploration of self-discovery. The story delivers an authentic and step-by-step evolution of identity that recognizes the challenges and doubts which come along with transformation. Janaki's emotional journey through guilt about leaving Riya and uncertainty about her new life with Arjun provides psychological depth to her struggle as it showcases the complex pain of seeking freedom within traditional constraints.

Jaishree Misra's storytelling functions as both a record of a woman's personal awakening and a reflective literary work which portrays the subtle bravery inherent in everyday acts of defiance. Through Janaki, the novel asks a vital question: Is it possible for women to change the societal script that has been imposed upon them? Janaki's life story demonstrates a cautious yet affirmative yes as the solution that relies on persistence rather than perfection.

*Ancient Promises* goes beyond personal narrative to serve as a political text that teaches readers to hear marginalized voices and question established cultural norms while demonstrating storytelling's power to create change. This narrative demonstrates that all women possess the ability to shape their futures regardless of being restricted or ignored.

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