



WOMEN ON WOMEN: ANJANA APPACHANA

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a woman's out look of the world. It is a political ideology that challenges the roles of male dominated society. Feminism seeks to expose the mechanism of patriarchy in works of art. The representations of women in the literary texts stress and justify sociopolitical oppression of women as natural. The Feminist movement aims at over throwing social practices that lead to the oppression and victimization of women. Woman's quest for self-knowledge and self-realization, which can in turn lead to the relationships based on mutual respect and understanding is the crux of Feminism.

The International Women's day celebrated in 1982 has awakened many women across the world, and so in India. Women in India started realizing their respective position in the society, their subjugation, and lack of freedom, slavery and various binding chains of custom, culture, and religion and ascertained their love for freedom. Feministic notions, movements have dominated ever since. They tried to understand the social structure and thought a number of solutions and tried to rewrite history. Women writing literature on women became an important postmodern phenomenon along with a new meaning given from the feminine consciousness to the old and established renowned epics and texts. The present paper presents the world of women representation from the point of view of Anjana Appachana in her short fiction.

Key words: *Feminism, political ideology, self-realization, relationships, mutual respect and understanding, Women writing literature on women, Anjana Appachana' short fiction.*

If it was the French dramatist Alexander Dumas who first coined the term 'feminism' in 1872, with the core idea of equality of woman with a man, feminists believe that man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish qualification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill.

He has done all he could do to debase and enslave her mind. (Sarah Grimke, 1970, p.10)



In India this struggle for woman's equality with man has been voiced all the more prominently in the last couple of decades. Literature being the true reflection of society represented the male domination, women protests, the subaltern condition of women and the anger of women for their helpless condition. If the first generation women writers like Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala have merely expressed their predicament through silent protests, the second generation of Indian women writers like Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Shashi Deshpande have challenged the male culture that prevails in the country. But the early soft voices of protest gradually turned into an explicit annoyance and finally took shape of an open rebellion. Shobha De, Arundhati Roy are modern woman writers who recognize the displacement and marginalisation of women and attempt to turn this pattern upside down through her works. Gradually, women presented women in their writing not as weak, emotional and subdued but symbolize the overpowering materialism and the lack of spirituality that characterized modern age. They rise to protest against the male dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom to act according to their will and continue to cherish their own dreams in futility. Women are treated as subaltern and mere 'man's shadow'. However, though they are considered as the otherness of man and not one with men or individuals, the role of women in society is even changing and women's fiction presents this social conflict and ideological struggle. The characters voice against the marginal culture but strangely detect the marginalisation of women still to be existence even today. They do not believe in describing their characters as love-slaves or mere helpmate at home but fight for equality and freedom, which still goes unheard in the patriarchal world.

So the modern women writers present women as far more assertive, domineering and bold in comparison to their male counterparts. They are neither submissive nor are guilty of their affairs and attitudes. An attempt to shatter the patriarchal hegemony in the Indian society fed on the best known in junction of the Manusmriti is observed:

*"Pita Rakshati Kaumarye, Bharta Rakshati Yeuvane, Rakshanti Stharire Putrah,
Nastri Swatantrhe Arhati"*

(The father protects her during adolescence, and the husband in her youth, and when she becomes old, she is protected by her sons. A woman does not deserve freedom).

What has made matters worse is the dichotomy between the idealized images of woman in literature.

"Yatra Naryastu Pujyante Ramante Tatra Devatah."



Obscuring the actual predicament of women, the system, instead of working for their liberation, induced them to seek consolation in myths. As Virginia Woolf puts it, "imaginatively she is of the highest importance, practically she is completely insignificant". Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature, fall from her lips, in the real life she could hardly read, could hardly speak and was the property of her husband. But may be women were very happy under their protective veil or purdah and enjoyed their due respect till the recent decades. The structure of the society has been changing due to different political and social ideologies. Women had to come out of their 'purdah' and help their counterpart in fulfilling the social obligations. She took up the burden willingly, besides the traditional role, which was imposed on her. But instead of appreciation, she was scorned, insulted and humiliated in the process.

Unlike many of her contemporary Indian short story fiction writers, Anjana Appachana's focus is on the domestic rather than political landscape of modern Indian life. Appachana uses women's sexuality and relationship – within families and within friends – as her major subjects *Incantation and other Stories (1991)* portray the tragedy of those caught in the whirlpool of modern India. These stories are set in the early eighties and present the middle class Indians. Her characters live their lives amid contradictions and double standards, superstitions and impossible dreams, but ultimately usurp their familiar landscape and imbue it with an idiosyncratic vision.

My Only Gods presents the relationship between mother and a young daughter who is very possessive about her mother. Her father was in the army and due to unknown reasons; the mother and the daughter were at the grand parent's house.

I loved my mother passionately, obsessively, jealously. I was well behaved only so long as no one made overtones to her or to me. She was careful not to show anyone affection in my presence. On the rare occasions she slipped – kissed a sister, hugged a friend – the house resounded with my screams. (4)

In fact, the girl looked very ordinary with flat nose, huge nostrils, practically no eyebrows, a wide forehead, but her parents looked exceptionally good looking. The girl's mother too endeared her very much. The daughter could not bear when one fine day her mother was talking to some unknown person.

He was looking at her and she sat at him and I was filled with such tenor that I cried out her name aloud, they shouted. I shrieked, go you go. He looked at me uncomprehendingly. I jumped up and down on the carpet, my fists clenched, panting, you, go, go, go, go. (9)



The sudden disappearance of the mother from the house with the reason that she had fever and that the doctor was making her all right was insensible to daughter. The girl felt very pathetic and hence the father was called for. Though she was temporarily happy with her father, she cried for her mother again. It was only after five days that the mother came back and the reunion was ecstatic and dramatic. The grandmother exclaimed.

She was back only because of you. She couldn't live without you. (10)

The disturbed relation between father and mother, their separation, the mother's stay at the grand parents, the mother's stories of Papa Rabbit being made into a pie, her talks with the unknown person, 'may be' her plans to marry him, the grandmother's lies about the mother's absence, finally the union of the father, mother and the protagonist are well written from the child's point of view. No character in the story has names which universalizes the theme and characters.

Similar relationship and the predicament of mother and daughter are well portrayed in the story *Her Mother*. Both the mother and daughter are nameless in the story and represent tradition and modern conflicting roles. The daughter is a modern Indian woman, educated, independent and at times headstrong and the mother is traditional, Indian wife and mother, looking after their younger daughter and husband. The entire story evolves from the mother's reminiscence and writing of the letter to her younger daughter who has shifted to America to do her Ph.D. in comparative literature.

The mother chooses to be a house wife and takes care of the children and household, because there is no other alternative and also because her husband compels her to. But in the process she finds herself objectified into the family's caregiver status whose purpose is only to provide sustenance. She's overlooked, ignored and reduced to insignificance by everyone.

With all your talk about women's rights, she wrote, you refuse to see that your father has given me none. And on top of that he says that I am a nag. If I am a nag, it is because he's made me one. (168)

In fact the father's and mother's marriage was love marriage because of which she had to take up all the family responsibilities to get the sister-in-law married so that she could remove the anger from the eyes of her mother-in-law. But she wanted her daughters to go for arranged marriage because –



In an arranged marriage you will not be disillusioned because you will not have any illusions to begin with. That is why arranged marriage works. (171)

The east, west encounter is well brought out by the mother. The agony of a typical Indian mother whose unmarried daughter has gone abroad alone is presented through the letter of the mother to the daughter.

Whatever your father's faults, infidelity isn't one of them. Now these Americans, they will divorce you at the drop of a hat. They don't know the meaning of the phrase, 'sanctity of marriage'. (171)

The elder daughter and her husband had had a registered marriage, refused to have even a reception and did not accept so much as a handkerchief from their respective parents. The younger daughter was only 17, when the older one got married five years ago, but she supported her sister and brother-in-law's decision to do without all the frills of an Indian wedding. She also defended her sister's decision to continue with her job in Bombay, when her husband came on a transfer to Delhi and started staying with them.

The elder daughter was too practical, especially about money, believed in saving and security but the brother-in-law was a spend thrift and easy going type that worried the mother. The mother thought that she understood her daughter thoroughly.

I always thought I understood you, she wrote, your dreams, your problems, but suddenly there is nothing that I understand. (167)

Neither when her younger daughter grew into womanhood a few years back, nor when she cut her long thick hair a few months back, nor the daughter's sudden decision to study at America in the recent times are understood by the mother. Throughout the writing of the letter, the mother is a repository of wisdom and morals as she provides her daughter with guidelines of proper etiquette and a healthy lifestyle that she hopes would keep secure in an alien land. But as the truth draws on her about the probability of an unacceptable family between her younger daughter and the son-in-law and the impending reparations of such and an alliance, the mother is never judgmental. She is definitely stunned but is loving and sympathetic also. The mother in the story is a protective nurturer and the daughter misleads her mother's action as self sacrificial and obedient. In fact the mother was trying to be in her own way right as a wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and mother, rather than being devoid of selfhood. The daughter as the liberated modern young woman ironically adopts the perspective molded by male oriented indoctrination and so understands her mother as an



object with no opportunity for her growth and wisdom. But the mother's revealing accounts the societal flaws which force women to adopt and to compromise.

As the mother ponders about her daughter's reactive way, both past and present, "The omniscience of motherhood that she thought she had lost gives her enough insight to piece together the past events and find her answers. When the daughter's undergoing pain, it is the mother who discerns the secret. Ultimately, the two must depend on each other once again for support and friendship. Rebecca Sultana says (189) 'the compromised happiness and withered dreams along with the strains on women in the modern times, confined by the family and betrayed by men, in fact both mother and daughter stand at the same juncture, looking for security'. Thus Appachana succeeds in depicting feminine predicament in the modern times, irrespective of the generation gaps with utmost fidelity.

Bahu is the story that presents the Indian joint family where the protagonist loves Siddharth. Both spend much time together, understand each other well and then get married. But she could not tolerate the less time that she spends with him after their marriage. It is working in the kitchen for her in-laws, sister-in-law and her husband that she is busy after her hours spent at her job.

I told Siddharth mournfully, we have little time together, we never talk. He seemed surprised. We'll never have more time than this, he said, and you must spend more time will all my relatives, they are anxious to get to know you. I did spend time with them, but it was never in addition to the time spent with Siddharth, it was instead of. We never seemed to have time for my own relatives and friends. (20)

And this depressed her more than anything. She was against having a baby for the reason that she was not prepared for motherhood and she would have no choice but to be a good bahu, twenty four hours a day. And once the child went to school, she would be too long out of the job market to find another job. But her in laws were very happy. Her depressed status resulted in a miscarriage and even Siddharth blamed her for everything. She needed protection from him and only he could have changed the situation but in most of the instances his silence made her wretched. She could not change anything especially when Siddharth accepted it. So she decided to leave him and his family.

What would it be to stay on my own? Just me and my room, my books, my music, my friends? Some men would think I was easy game. What would they say at work? We always thought she was such a nice girl. One wouldn't have expected this of her. (31)

The predicament of a typical Indian son like Siddharth is well presented in the story. He says

Don't think I don't understand, Siddharth said. But what can be done about it? This is the way things are you have to learn to accept it. (32)

But she is determined to leave him and she leaves the house with the helpless words of Siddharth 'I'll wait for you' (33). The feministic concerns of freedom of an individual at its prime importance are well seen through the character of the protagonist.

The weaker angle of the women in Indian society is presented by Appachana through the female characters in *Incantations*. With Sangeeta and Geeti as daughters of a middle class family, the story starts on the eve of the marriage of Sangeeta with Nikhil who is a C.A. and quite smart looking young boy. Both the families are happy with their marriage and with the permission of the parents, both move out for pictures and shopping together. At this juncture on the eve of the marriage, Sangeeta reveals the truth that she was raped by Nikhil's brother Abhinay two days ago, to Geeti, her twelve year old sister, with a promise never to tell the secret to anyone. Sangeeta is married off and settles quite happily, till Abhinay shifts to their house with the pretext of taking lessons of C.A. from his brother Nikhil.

She told me that every morning when Nikhil was away on work, Abhinay raped her and night Nikhil did. (120)

All these facts are known only to Geeti and she slowly became silent and over matured with all her sister's secrets. Unable to understand Geeti's changed attitude, her mother called Mala mousi who also was a Gynecologist. Because of her open mindedness and communication with warmth, Geeti, could confide the truth to Mala mousi, but surprisingly not to her mother. Mala mousi takes Geeti to her house for a change. But later, after a few years, Geeti comes to know that Sangeeta is dead and so she was sent to mousi's house purposefully. Years later, Geeti comes to know that Sangeeta's death was not accidental but suicidal.

And before she killed herself hanging from the fan, Abhinay lay below, next to the door dead too. (129)

Geeti eventually is married and wanted her husband to understand her past with compassion, "Mad, obsessed, he said of me. 'Crazy' he said of my sister (133), and so Geeti slowly started turning away from him. Geeti came down to Mala mousi who listened to her.

Yes I am in between, not married, fat, discontented and accepting like my mother, or unmarried, uncompromising and independent like Mala mousi, but separated for



the time being from my uncomprehending angry husband, having shed my old fantasies for another – that of empathy, tenderness and companionship. (133)

Nikhil on the contrary looked grey prematurely, walked with a slight stoop and had lost forever the charm that was so much part of him. He wanted to know what Sangeeta told Geeti. All these years it had obsessed him, knowing that Sangeeta had talked to Geeti, not knowing what she had said. Neither Mala mousi nor parents allowed him to see Geeti. When Geeti reveals the secret, he feels very sorry and ends up saying,

I will have to pray. I will go to Amarnath next month to pray that I can atone to her in next birth. (135)

The logic that her parents, her sister, Nikhil and Geeti must have sinned voluptuously, horribly in their previous births, is a typical Indian philosophy of birth, rebirth, sin and cleansing with devotion in God are in conflict with modern western out look of life in this story.

The mother and daughter relationship in *My Only Gods* and *Her Mother* well represent the feminine predicament from generation gap, age and time point of view. The protagonist of the story *Bahu* is an epitome of the modern woman entangled between the family responsibilities and self-recognition. Unable to decide between the two she walks out of the house as a liberated woman. *Incantations*. is a remarkable story that presents the feminine predicament to the fullest extent. The characters of Sangeeta and Geeti become the archetype of the subaltern in the modern society. The patriarchal domination and the silence of women along with their anger and revolt are well revealed in the story. Thus Anjana Appachana portrays the varied angles, conflicts and predicaments of modern Indian women entangled between traditional out look of a woman and the modern society with a change in culture in many aspects.

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