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## Am I Heard? How does it Matter Anyways?

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### **Abstract:**

There is nothing foreign about sacrifice, submission, a need for respect, a desire to be heard, a wish for identity and validation of one's thoughts and beliefs, a hunger for the freedom to be our genuine selves. Anjana Appachana's works deal with all these issues which become a problem and a barrier for women. She portrays these issues in assorted ways through her various characters. Male characters are at some places shown in positive light but then their insensitivity towards their female counterparts is highlighted with the help of various incidences. She employs chain of events arranged intelligently to underline the oppressions and exploitations faced by female world at the hands of the society. Society dominates and diffuses her identity as individual self and declines her to be an individual with space of her own, by making her to adhere to the self made rules of patriarchal society. Since these repeated sequences of suppression have become so engraved in society that these have been embossed on the minds and souls of females. Even a small effort to break the shackles horrifies a feminine mind with all the abominable tags that would be given to her. To be a part of this societal structure she, therefore, decides to be quiet. This paper deals with the question that how much of what each of us deals with is due to our choice to remain silent and keep secrets? The silence or secrets may stem from our desire to protect those we love, but at what cost, to them and us?

**Keywords:** oppression, women, patriarch, society, silence, feminism, identity

### **Introduction:-**

Anjana Appachana is an author who truly interprets and represents Indian middle class women and their lives through her writings. She makes her characters speak about everyday life of Indian culture and society. The theme of her writing mostly concentrates on the existence of women and their quest for identity. Dealing with domestic issues and the societal behaviour towards women she succeeds in bringing out the suffocating oppressed environment to which Indian women are more often exposed to. The households and the characters actually are the microcosmic view of Indian society. Anjana Appachana is one such writer who unfailingly explores the pain and torment in the quelled world of Indian women. Their concerns, desires and dreams form the dominant issue of Anjana Appachana's works. Her protagonists are often seen choked by the domestic, traditional and social confinements; they are ever seen struggling for the survival. In revert of all the duties, responsibility and devotion she extends to society, she is given to exploitation, oppression, suffocation and ultimately, silence. The heart filled with pain, the parched saliva and eyes gleaming with tears need to be out poured but these are always halted in the name of shame and ignominy.

Feminism is the most indefinable, evasive and revolutionized subject in history of world literature. This movement had revised the interest in women's as well as about women writings. Over a long period of time, the role and contribution of women in every area has been underestimated; the spread of feminist movement has commenced the re valuations of women's academic, literary, social and political role. With the coinage of term "feminism" by Charles Fourier, a Utopian Socialist and French philosopher, in 1837, the entire perspective towards literature started changing, the interest was given over to renewal and rehabilitation of texts written by and of women. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy. Anyhow, anyone talking about female and giving some importance to her desires, instincts, ideas and needs is charged to be feminist; this somehow tends to deviate one from the actual meaning of feminism.

Feminism to a great extent deals with the physical and psychological, conscious and unconscious world of woman. Female as a subject has been dealt with by wide range of writers. In the name of shame, cultural confinements, religious obligations and domestic responsibilities, females portrayed are made to be quiet against oppression. Different cultural, geographical and political settings and altogether different physical descriptions fail to eradicate the ways of oppression and exploitation. It may be Tess of d'Urbervilles set in backdrop of England in Victorian age or Sangeeta of "Incantations" from modern India; all are exploited at the hands of patriarchal societies. As it does not seem to change its ways and ideas towards woman and it really does not matter if society is European or Indian, educated or uneducated, developed or under developed. Due to the biological difference, a woman is seen as weaker sex only good for reproduction and domestic liabilities. These domestic liabilities encompass wide ambit ,starting from being at service of in laws from early morning to being at the disposal of husband's pleasure in bed at night , with or without her own will. Moreover, Indian women are over burdened with social, cultural and religious confinements which in no way give any respect to the feelings and desires of females as a living being. The women of middle class Indian society are mostly represented in literature as the central characters of many novels and short stories.

### **Analysis:**

Anjana Appachana's short stories "Bahu", "Incantations" and her novel "Listening Now" provide the reader with disturbing accounts of sexual harassment and exploitation. Undergoing silently through all the physical and psychological tortures at the hands of society and in the name of tradition,culture and shame become a constraint for the survival of women in Indian society. In the midst of globalisation, modernity and social change, still the Indian society maintains its stubborn orthodox idea about woman and the same becomes the theme of these works. All the three works deal with the subdued world of females in the name of social obligations and taboos. The females keep on getting exploited at the hands of patriarch society but could not dare to speak a word due to fear of being called "shameless". This unveils the truth of Indian society which tends to blame the female for everything, no matter if she is a victim or a convict; she has to pay in one or the other way. Even the most pious institution of marriage does not fail to victimise woman. Rather it provides the society a

more legal platform to violate woman. All the stories are based on oppression of woman and her exposure to the choking confinements and suffocating male oriented traditions and cultures of Indian society, ultimately leading her to "silence". The short story "Bahu" is a story of oppression and silence, imposed by a woman who is an exploiter of daughter in law; woman is exploited here by another woman and not any man. The authority and domination of mother in law is society itself in microcosm. "Bahu" being a story of unnamed daughter in law becomes a story of almost all the households of Indian middle class families. The protagonist of the story is unnamed and therefore, she is called as 'bahu' only. This is an evidence of loss of her identity as human being. She is given importance in household as bahu only which is nothing more than a tag given to her for accomplishing some homely duties. Under the name 'bahu', the protagonist loses her actual name which is indicative of the fact that her name does not matter at all. She is seen as daughter in law, wife, mother, sister in law but her own self is dissolved somewhere. She is shown always living under the controlling presence of her mother in law. Mother in law, if seen from broader perspective, is the representative of dominating society which always keeps a check on the females and to confine them in boundaries, certain rules are introduced for females which are always violated by society itself. These rules either formed or violated results only in sufferings, agony and dismay of one sect of society named "women". The daughter in law could not speak a word but had to be quiet otherwise she might be charged with the debasing accusations such as "bad" daughter in law "spoiled" "meretricious" and many more. Her words of pain and her search of lost identity remain unsaid.

In "Incantations" the insensitivity of society towards women and more rigorous exploitations at the hands of society in the name of marriage is highlighted. The oppression by mother in law in "Bahu" as power flaunt of society shifts to more disturbing fact. In the story Sangeeta the protagonist is shown being raped by her brother in law 'Abhinav' before marriage and Sangeeta is forced to keep quiet by her conscious self as she is well aware of the fact that she will be the sufferer ultimately. Moreover, she decides not to speak as she knows "no one would believe" she and she will be said to be "despoiled". The circumstances deteriorate as Abhinav continues his lubricious acts of inhumanity even after marriage. He rapes her when her husband, Nikhil, is at work and she is left to live in more suffocating environment. She is just a passive witness of her own modesty outraged everyday at the hand of her brother in law. Unable to speak and revolt against this torture, she relegates herself to the torturing world of silence. Abhinav is a representative of society in which to be a man means to be able to exploit and oppress his victim to no end. For him Sangeeta's silence either means her acceptance or her fear and in both the cases he is victorious as he may continue with his behaviour. He never understands or even tries to understand the actual reason behind her silence, her pain and her virtual death every day. The whole novel, its plot and theme becomes the representation of self centred patriarchal society which takes pleasure in exploiting the females according to its own desires and wishes. This never ending long silence has moulded this category of society in such a manner that most of them take torture and domestic violence as a part of their duty and they never fail in religiously catering to the needs of the society and their household. Deciding not to speak may be a result of seeking harmony at domestic front or saving her dignity in society from being tarnished further but

her silence is ever thought as either her acceptance or her weakness . The actual reason of silence is never a problem of society. Who cares, the trembling lips which do not utter a single word after years of ordeal? How a woman in an asylum is pregnated? It really is no matter to discuss till the time she abandons herself to all the demands of society. Sangeeta's silence reflects the pain more critical and acute than what she suffers at the hands of her brother in law. She does not find anyone worth discussing the turmoil she is going through. This frustrates her and she is weakened from inside, but then energy conservation is a law of nature, energies are never destroyed, they only change form. The torture which is making her weak and frustrated at last ends up in sudden outburst and she castrates Abhinav and leave him to bleed till death. This would not have happened if she had been allowed a proper Catharsis. She could not find any outlet to her fears, pain and emotions which hypes her suffocation. She is only able to discuss with her sister. While discussing the issue she reveals that she is a sufferer even at the hands of her husband who rapes her every night. She reveals that only difference between Nikhil and Abhinav is that Nikhil is more patient but this "patience" only prolongs the pain. She is a sufferer in his absence as well as in his presence. She cannot think of any rescue as she finds herself only a commodity to her husband who enjoys her without giving any respect the act which would have been a symbol of their love and involvement ends up being the haunting act of rape. The "Incantations" is a story of society in microcosm where certain devices like authority of brother, rights of marital relationships, etc are employed to the societal structure by the violators themselves to oppress the "women" hence making them the subalterns. Anjana Appachana employs her characters to speak at the top of their voice of the atrocious attitude of society towards women. She successfully demonstrates the ways of oppression and the reasons for year's long silence. Moreover, her works hide in them the idea of outburst after reaching a pinnacle of pain and silence. The unspoken words which tend to sicken and paralyse the physical, moral, social and psychological self of the oppressed ones are the highlights of her works. In both the short stories, it is a woman who suffers at the hand of society through social institutions and her own people are the torturers and oppressors.

However, in her novel "Listening Now" She amalgamates the attitude of whole society towards females .The novel successfully speaks about the society as unsafe for women. In the novel, rampant acts of sexual assaults are casually or callously inflicted on females by men. The men involved in this are father's boss, brother's friends and strangers on street hence they point towards the irresponsible and oppressive attitude of society towards women. The entire novel becomes a showcase of suffering, pain, shame, and silence running ubiquitously through it. The novel is a narrative of different stories of oppression and exploitation of women at the hands of society. It is the story of Padma who is an English professor raising her daughter Mallika, alone in Delhi. She is alone as she has no husband, but she has the support of her sister, her estranged mother, and her close-knit set of friends. She is ostensibly a widow, even to her closest friends, who are perfectly and silently sure of her goodness. One of her friends thinks she is a divorcée and the other correctly identifies her as unmarried but they do not discuss this with anyone, including each other. The mystery of the love affair that produced Mallika propels the plot, but the story is much bigger than that. Each section is from a different perspective: Mallika; Padma; Padma's sister: Shanta; Padma's mother:

Rukmini; Padma's friends: Anuradha and Madhu; and finally Mallika's long-absent father. Each person focuses on their own life, conveying a cross-section of personalities and situations in a complex network of relationships and feelings. The different voices, the different characters, the sense of the women's histories and daily lives form the theme of the novel. The novel evokes a strong sense of the cultural context and quiet desperation that characterized these women's lives in a variety of ways. It also evokes a strong sense of the constant, minute, wearying denigrations of women, the threat of violence, and the violence that goes unacknowledged and unrecognized, sometimes even by the victim. Perhaps it is known by the victim but her inability to speak is generally taken as an attitude. The story of outraging women's modesty does not go unnoticed even in this novel. Several times women characters are spotted retelling the tales of such mental agony. Mallika mentions how she along with her friends was teased by two men passing by on a scooter who hit her in chest, one of the most frequent acts of violence against women marked in Indian society. They roars "loud and triumphant" after grabbing Mahima's thigh and Prabha's breast. Madhu reveals a horrifying incident in which she escaped a rape narrowly while she enjoyed an evening outing with her other friends. Neither could they speak a word nor were they encouraged to do so as policemen standing a few yards away "stood grinning". The novel goes a step further in identifying another form of oppression which is almost witnessed and silently taken by every woman of Indian society and this is their inability to explore the areas of their interest, personal pursuits. Anu, Padmini's friend, become a representative of females with subdued passions or hobbies as she has to snub her talent as classical dancer for the sake of her family, the fact, however, is well known to her family. She is a sufferer at the hands of her mother in law and whenever she tries to tell this to her husband she is convicted for misrepresenting his mother's actions. The theme of men's ignorance towards the desires and wishes of their wives becomes more prominent when Shanta's husband gives her a sari of grey colour, the colour she neither likes nor wears. This proves that her husband does not even know her likes and dislike, whereas she is shown taking care of all his minutest likes and dislikes. She must wear whatever is given to, shows an attitude that further hides her identity. She is a wife and for wife whatever is given by husband is excellent, this attitude shouts at its highest pitch through this unconscious gesture. The agony further worsens when Anu recalls her sexual relationship with her husband, which ends up being very mechanical. She longs for his tender embrace but cannot tell him her desire. With the words unspoken her wish and desire is deep buried in the name of shame as "such things could never be uttered". Incident of repeated pregnancies of Madhu shouts for the insensitivity of husbands and certain things which are taken for granted in the institution like marriages and the body of woman is seen as something to be a continuous sufferer in order to cater to the needs and desires of the more powerful in such institutions. The novel testifies the presence of desires, passions, urges and longings of Indian women which despite of being present in their conscious are left unsaid due to certain obligations and taboos such as "shame" "sacrifice" "tradition" "culture". The filth keeps on piling up and women suffering the deep rooted pain at the hands of society is made to suffocate and die in that situation without even uttering a word. The silence, when voices itself, becomes violent

## Conclusion

The stories set in Indian middle class deals with the oppressed and plundered world of females. The obligations imposed on women by the society are merely the tools at the hands of society to ease the exploitation and legalise the torture. Anjana Appachana, through her stories explores the unsaid and unheard world of Indian middle class females. Her characters speak of the oppression through the language of silence. Their unspoken words are their language of narrating the story of their traumatised world. All the three stories speak about different mediums of exploitation but the end result is same in all the cases and that is "silence". It is only in "Incantations" that the protagonist raises her voice after undergoing series of exploitative events, and that raised voice is nothing but murder of her own woman hood. The woman who only can, after god, give the birth to new life is turned to the messenger of death for Abhinav. The words which were snubbed in her unconscious for so long poisoned her conscious, and her silence ends up with sudden outburst. In other narratives the silence is the companion of the protagonist and the only way to lead "harmonious life". The passion, desires and urges which otherwise are present in the females, are snubbed on the name of morality, tradition, shame, society and taboos. The "bahu" is suppose to behave in a set manner and if she dares to move out of that arena which will be labelled "bad", "irresponsible" and ultimately "unfit" for entering or continuing with the "pious" institution of marriage. Suppressing her desires to chase her dreams and hobbies comes out as another form of exploitation. To be a good wife, mother and daughter in law, she has to leave her own pursuits. In nutshell, all the works are true representations of the unsympathetic behaviour of society towards women who have been considered as "weaker sex" or "second sex" by the patriarchal society. The silence in the narratives speaks at its highest pitch about the fallacy in modernising the nation without abolishing the barriers of gender.

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