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Exploring Feminist Consciousness in Select Short Stories of Anjana Appachana-A Critical Study

M.Sarika¹, Full-Time Research Scholar Department of English, Yogi Vemana University Kadapa; Mail: mylarisarika@gmail.com Corresponding Author

Dr. R.V Jayanth Kasyap² Associate Professor Department of English Yogi Vemana University Kadapa

Anjana Appachana is one of the reputed writers of Indian Diaspora. She won international acclaim with her maiden collection of short stories *Incantations and Other Stories* (1991). She received overwhelming response with her novel *Listening Now* (1998). Her second novel *Fear and Lovely* which was published recently. Through her collection of short stories, she explored the problems of Indian middleclass women who are caught in the web of domestic and socio-cultural constraints. Indian Diaspora writers have dealt with various issues like displacement, alienation, assimilation and cultural adaptation. Anjana Appachana in her fictional endeavours deals with the themes of separation, oppression and predicament of women in India. Feminist consciousness is evidently present in her works. It enhances our understanding of gender relations and the construction of gender identity. As a writer of Indian Diaspora, Anjana Appachana focuses on the predicament of women in Indian society in her works. Reading of her short stories gives an impression about her greater sensitivity to socio-cultural problems and personal conflicts faced by women in general, Indian women in particular. Moreover, Feminist Consciousness is wide apparent in her works. Therefore, the present paper titled *Exploring Feminist Consciousness in Select Short Stories of Anjana Appachana- A Critical Study* examines Anjana's depiction of lives of those women who grapple with irksome life situations.

Keywords: Isolation, Tradition, Displacement, Supremacy, Suppression and Dominance

Introduction: Her collection **Incantations and Other Stories** is about the different issues of women, particularly Indian women. The collection is of the



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women, for the women and by the woman. In the collection **Incantations and Other Stories**, Anjana

explores ‘the lives and experiences of middle-class families, particularly those of the women who live within and are defined by the expectations of these families’ (Kaul 121). Women remain resilient bearing shame and suffering. Their suffering has been deftly treated in her short stories.

My Only Gods is the first short story collection in **Incantations and Other Stories** and it centres on inner conflict of child who feels alienated as she deprived of childhood bliss and adequate parental love. In Indian context, mother is held in high esteem and there is divinity about her grace and presence. The child in the story unnamed craves for the care and affection of her parents and due to certain domestic conflicts, she lives at her grandparents’ house along with her mother. The feminist consciousness in Anjana surfaces when the young girl suffers from deep mental anxiety and feels the loneliness which intensifies her agony. The young girl so fond of her mother is shocked beyond description when her mother suddenly disappears. The reasons about her mother’s absence do not satisfy girl’s anxiety for her mother and she strongly yearns for her presence. The arrangements made calling for her father brings her more solace but only the arrival of her mother makes her to feel joyous and delighted. Anjana’s great concern towards young girl is reflected in this story. The issue raised in the story may not be gender sensitive or gender specific yet the sympathy for the young girl a victim of deprivation of parental affection is apparent. Further, Anjana raises a valid point about the need for a cordial and domestic environment essential for the growth of the child. Lack of conjugal harmony between father and mother poses serious threat to the young girl’s peaceful survival and happiness. The story narrated from the girl’s point of view skilfully presents the girl’s predicament caused by the circumstances which are beyond her control. In a certain sense Anjana’s present story emphasizes the need for the parental love to ensure proper emotional and intellectual growth, and well-being of children. It is very clear that the young girl seeks nothing but the warm presence of mother and father which provides her to become strong and confident. The girl is unaware about the conception of God endeavours to seek God in her parents craving for their valuable support and blessings. The separation of husband and wife is the brutal cause offering no promise her future. Anjana Appachana perhaps



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visualizes the sorry state of a girl who yet has not received the benefits and fruits of proper upbringing the eminent goal to be performed by her parents.

In the next story **Bahu** one can witness the transition of Anjana's thought as she deals with live situation of **Bahu** as daughter in law. It is about a newly married girl in a male dominating family of India. The daughter-in-law in the story is unnamed as she has no significance in her law's home and her identity is by virtue of her husband Siddarth. In general, every newly wedded girl expects and imagines a better life after her marriage especially about her husband and enters a new life with many aspirations. Anjana depicts the conflicts and problems of a newly married girl who does not receive love, care and assistance from her husband's family. The feminist consciousness rises when the young daughter- in- law who feels depressed and disturbed due to conjugal disharmony in her relationship. Her anguish for familial love, concern and liberty in her husband's home has been portrayed by Appachana. Bahu feels so disturbed because of conjugal unrest in her life. The love before wedding between the couple dwindles and a huge gap is created giving scope for misgivings. There is no space and privacy to her in her husband's and to talk to him personally. On account of chores she feels isolated and detached from her family and friends. Her misery for not getting and spending time with her husband has been depicted in the following lines;

I told Siddarth mournfully, we have little time together, we never talk. He seemed surprised. We will never have more time than this, he said and you must spend more time with 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 with Siddarth., it was instead of.... We never seemed to have time for my own relatives and friends (p.20).

The mental and psychological happiness that she received from her parents is what is missing in law's house. She is unable to visit her parents for her constant work. Anjana clearly is critical about tradition and domestic responsibilities. The dominance and unkind behaviour of her mother- in- law makes her feel frustrated causing mental crisis. She also remembers the words of her mother in "adjustment is necessary" to marriage (p.16). Instead of adjustment here she seeks liberty and she wishes to live her life the way she likes. One can find the clash between



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Individuality and Tradition through the character of Bahu.

She feels isolated due to a sea change in her husband's attitude. Her love for Siddarth stops her from quitting the house. The negligence, irresponsible and ignorance of her husband creates nothing but despair. The domestic violence by her in laws makes her to stay away from responsibilities. Her feelings and emotions are ignored. She becomes emotionally drained as she does not want to remain as a traditional bahu. She receives no support, comfort and psychological relief at the time of her miscarriage. One can find she enters the life that she is not chosen, and seeking love from her husband, and feels utterly alone and despondent. The male domination in the house makes her docile and silent. Instead of spending time with her he blames her for not sparing time with his family. The situation is not under her control and the damage is irreparable. Towards the end of the story, she rejects everything and walks out of the house with confidence in spite of Siddarth's assurance of waiting for her. Instead of understanding her psychological pain he reminds of her responsibilities. But she feels happy about her decision and lives as an independent woman after leaving her in laws' home. She joins her friend and decides to make her own home for her. She would have proudly thought hers is not "one of those marriages" which she thought (p.17). She had safely escaped as she does not want to be as a servant but yearning to live independently and peacefully. Bahu is portrayed as the one who liberates herself from traditional fetters and seeks to lead life.

Anjana narrates the tale of woe of two young girls, Amrita and Hemalatha in the short story **The Prophecy**. While they are studying in the institution, they become friends and reside in the hostel. The tendency of certain girls in adolescence to receive male attention is presented physically in the story. The intimacy and relationship of Amrita with her boyfriend Rakesh is portrayed by Anjana. Amrita gets closer to Rakesh and eventually becomes pregnant. The immaturity of the girls misleads them and they are caught in a fix. Indians believe astrology in matrimonial matters prescribed in the story. The girls consult an astrologer instead of consulting gynaecologist. Astrologer says to Amrita; 'After I perform puja, your stars will change. You will marry a handsome, fair, rich,



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influential man. You will have two sons who will rise to powerful positions in the government. They will also travel abroad, many times' (p. 64).

The feminist consciousness in Anjana surfaces when the young girl Amrita becomes so scared about her family and society which makes her to conceal this issue with her parents. Even though her friend persuades her marry with Rakesh who is handsome, caring and amicable she rejects as he does not instil confidence in her. The decision of consulting a gynaecologist for aborting reveals her fear about her future. They take advice from Dr. Kumar and follow his prescription. She earns a bad name on account of her relationship with Rakesh and faces humiliation from the superintendent. She is expelled from college and Amrita's parents send a word by the college authorities, to take their daughter. She is taken to the hospital by their parents and finally recovered. She has to leave her graduation incomplete, has to bear two babies in the successive years, and finally becomes a house wife instead of being able to live her dream of becoming a journalist (p.70). Though she is married to an IAS officer; she receives no encouragement from him to complete her education. Her passion and dreams have been ignored and remain unfulfilled. Even though her husband is educated but it is not apparently not shown in the story that he never recognizes her wife's interests and desires.

Conclusion:

Anjana Appachana in her stories depicts problem-ridden women's world. One can observe both pathos and joy in her works. The problems of women in tradition bound Indian society have been explored through her collection of short stories **Incantations and Other Stories**. The male dominance, relationships and sensitivity towards women have been skilfully portrayed on this collection. The empathy towards the suppression and oppression of women has been clearly explored. The craving of the daughter, the anguish of Bahu and the anxiety of Amrita demonstrate her empathy for the stress ridden women. The solutions lie in coming to terms with the life situations or seeking freedom to lead a fresh lease of life, Her Diasporics sensibility has been clearly portrayed through this collection. The domestic violence in the patriarchal society has been shown through her characters. She represents the predicament of middle-class women and their lives through this collection. The feministic consciousness has been depicted in other



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short stories and fictional works which truly deserve critical attention.

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