

DELINEATION OF MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP FROM THE NOVEL 'LISTENING NOW' BY ANJANA APPACHANA

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Abstract : The fundamental concept behind sustenance of humanity and life could be attributed from the unadulterated love and harmony expressed by the man and woman. The very classification of relationships between man and woman and the dualities within and outside the pretext of marriage has been implicitly bestows us with the idea that marriage is the only valid space for people to be intimate to one another. The society has hailed ambitiously towards building up a prescribed pseudo-ethical consensus. Such supposedly "illicit" relationship in a contemporary society is not chastised as much compared to older times. Many Indian novelists have raised their concerns on the widening of such ideologies that has been unexplored in the earlier time.

With mounting up of innumerable consequences and controversies within the relationship of husband and wife, the very notion of harmony and love became questionable. Anjana Appachanna's *Listening Now* has intricately delved deeper into these complex cobwebs and delineated on the various issues that are faced among husband and wife and how treachery and deception has rendered the novel's protagonist who undergoes endless suffering, as a result of her hasty decision. This paper delves deeper into the emotional psyche on how a man and woman relationship exists in today's contemporary society and how beautifully Appachanna utilized her literary skills in depicting man-woman relationship in this novel.

IndexTerms - man-woman relationship, Illicit relationship, contemporary society, Anjana Appachanna, Listening Now

I. INTRODUCTION

The human marvels and ingenuity which we are witnessing today, was sowed deeply by the early men, who made their first civilization inside a cave to thrive against the challenging odds by creating trust and relationships between one another. Similar to a pack of wolves and a pride of lions, we humans took a step ahead in creating society, relationship, love and family. Even a minor entity of a human relationship, have a synergistic impact over the society. For instance, the man-woman relationship is the fundamental element for building a family. A family is recognized only when it has an external influence over other people, thus building a society. Society on the other hand, builds the entire nation.

Marriage has been deemed as a sacred relationship that binds the lives of two individuals into family life. This conservative outlook that prevailed in the west as well as in the eastern parts of the world and has thrived for more than a millennia. Such a belief is supported by religious texts and practices which also advocates the rigid practice of union of man and woman, only in marriage. Any relationship outside the context of marriage is generally not supported by the traditional notions of a society and thus it is subjected to moral criticism. Marriage appears to be one of the sacred and oldest institutions in human civilization. The earliest form of marriages were probably comprised of man woman relationship of living together in harmony, however with primal reasons of food, shelter, protection and for creating upcoming generations through bearing children. As Shaw rightly represents the actual scenario of a man and woman's role in a family as:

Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together; they only breakfast together, dine together, and sleep in the same room. In most cases the woman knows nothing of her working life (he calls it her home life) (Shaw: 11)

At a certain point, the requirements tend to evolve, when they experienced love and companionship as an essential element in their lives. Love and trust goes hand in hand in a relationship, as trust cannot be something that all loving relationships and marital bliss would start with. However some of the couples bridge the 'magic' of trustworthiness in their lives, within few years of their marital bondage. However for majority of the people, it is still an inconceivable task in their relationship. The happy and lovable relationship after marital relationship and the reason behind its success that thrives till the end of their lives depends on the basis of trust. Trust appears to be so pervasive that relationship never gives a second thought for suspicion.

Couples having a closer bondage of love in their relationships could clearly identify that the bliss and dependency which they express towards one another does not rely on the sexual desire and satisfaction that they seek between each other. The never ending love is the perfect reflection of caring, trust and love that they have developed with one's mate. The rudimental element of true love can be attributed from the trustworthiness shared between the couples. When destroying this very foundation, would eventually result in deterioration of marital bliss and love.

Love does not ensure anyone that the couple who express more concern towards another means that particular person is right in his acts. In this particular scenario, the treatment of equality between a man and woman aids in building the relationship to the next level. In this paper, we will explore the intricacies and complex machinations that has been dealt without affecting the flow and aesthetic usage of English in Anjana's debut novel '*Listening Now*' have expressed on how love and trustworthiness was

lacking between the couples and how ultimately it affected their lives. The novel also expressed multitudes of external factors and their intrusion in the marital relationship. The upcoming sections will discuss in detail regarding the negative aspects in marital relationships, which were elementary for building the relationships between husband and wife.

II. TRANSGRESSIONS WITNESSED IN ‘MAN-WOMAN’ RELATIONSHIP AND ITS INCORPORATION IN THE NOVEL

Over the generations, counterculture and the advent of liberal worldview has challenged this notion marital bondage. Dynamics in man-woman relationships have constantly transgressed over the centuries. There is no reason to believe that marriage is the only way that any meaningful relationships can be made between two people.

Any relationship outside the context of marriage is generally not supported by the traditional notions of a society and thus is subject to moral criticism. That predominantly includes pre-marital and “illicit” relationships. These are not to be viewed as a by-product of the degradation of an ethical society. Rather, such transgressions have existed since the inception of the concept of marriage itself.

From the Lacanian perspective, such actions that offend the existing popular notion in a society are offensive only because of the existence of a moral institution. In the absence of a system that enjoys majority support in a society; such actions cease to be considered as transgressive. The affairs or pre-marital relations in this case become the “objet petit a” or object of desire. Pre-marital relations are defined in terms of having physical relations with someone before the marriage. A traditional outlook would not dare to express it in such explicit sense, but it is nevertheless true. Opposition against free sexual or general emotional intimacy between man and woman is justified using either religion or tradition. It is the core area from which toxic concepts of virginity and chastity emerge from.

Comparatively, it is hard to argue against the opposition for illicit affairs outside the confines of marriage. There is no exact way to contemplate as it is made highly subjective by the experience of each of the individuals in different marriages. It can be asserted that extra-marital affairs; keeping the ethical arguments aside, threaten the institution of marriage.

Criticism against extra-marital affairs on the basis of moral values and trust is bound to crumble when the underlying structures on which marriages are based on is brought up. A marriage itself favors a man “taking” a woman for his wife. Infidelity has a more serious implication on a woman rather than on a man. This owes its origins to the fact that sexual role of women is dictated by society only to please and satisfy the husband. It is both hypocritical and naïve to state that all people who are unfaithful are wretched and have a loose character.

The same can be said for pre-marital sex also. In atypical scenario before marriage, women are expected to be “pure”; to “save” themselves for their future husbands. At the same time, there is no pressure on the man to abstain from physical relationships. This is a classic scenario of women are treated as objects within the realm of marriage.

Anjana Appachana is known for her short stories, but her debut novel lives up to the reputation of her other works as well. “Listening Now” utilizes the technique of narrating a story from the perspective of different characters. The novel retells an incident from the perspectives of its several women characters. Poonkodi expresses Appachana’s representation of woman’s character in marital bondage as:

According to Anjana’s women, marriage is a symbol of absurdity. The awareness of it inculcates a revolting mind with which the characters perceive the world and the human situations in an indifferent way that proliferates innumerable and inexplicable woes and miseries. (Poonkodi, 256)

The plot is mainly driven by Padma and her relationship with her daughter. Padma is the sister of Rukmini; both raised by a typical couple comprising of an authoritarian father and a submissive mother. She unfolds over three generations of woman and their perspective towards their life. The author writes about a family which portrays the typical Indian family with a rigid and unforgiving father, and a mother who tries to survive each day against her husband without triggering him along with her two daughters- Rukhmani and Padma.

Story explores the life of Padma who has thrown discretion in air and ends up in an affair, whereas Rukmini who fights back against the challenges and is headstrong and motivated in her actions. Padma’s growing years are adventurous; she has a free-spirit which is quickly crushed when she has a child with her college lover and he abandons her. This event sets the tone for the novel; setting up an endearing tale when the separation of the lovers is recounted from the eyes of Mallika, Padma’s daughter. Padma’s neighbor Anu and Madhu are the support system, she dearly looked out for. This story talks about the lives of new woman the society has witnessed in recent times.

In this paper, we explore the complex intricacies of husband and wife relationship and how Anjana has beautifully emphasized the variations between each individuals through her characterization of each personality in the novel. The following subsection concentrates only on man-woman relationship and how it is expressed from the author’s standpoint is elaborated.

III. REPRESENTATION OF MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN ANJANA APPACHANA’S ‘LISTENING NOW’

Anjana Appachana was born in Coorg, India. She finished her schooling at Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya, Gwalior and finished her graduation from Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Pennsylvania State University. Her journey to the literary world begun with her first book ‘Incantations and Other Stories’ in 1991. After a decade, the book was reissued by Penguin in India in 2006. She was awarded with O. Henry Festival Prize for her creative writing fellowship from National Endowment for the Arts , US.

After her debut novel, her second book and first novel ‘Listening Now’ was published in the year 1997 by Random House. She currently lives with her husband and a young daughter in Tempe, Arizona. Anjana Appachana’s novels try to express the cravings, yearnings and desire from numerous souls that were trapped within the helpless predicament. The themes that were

primarily targeted by the novelist over women emancipation and the intricacies and the failure of marital bondage and the notion of pre-marital relationship.

This particular novel has explored the lives of married woman and how their relationship with husbands changes between their personas with circumstances. The novel render the readers to understand the marital relationships from the women's perspective as it deeply delves into the psyche of married woman and her tireless journey, woes, miseries and traumas collectively expressing these emotional cobwebs, from the lives of Rukmani and Padma.

Kiranpreet Kaur stated that the works of Appachana to represent:

'rights of marital relationships..... 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. (Kaur, 133)

IV. RUKMANI'S FATE: LIFE OF A TYPICAL INDIAN WOMAN, SUBJUGATED BY HUSBAND'S WHIMS

In the novel, Rukmani the protagonist's mother, whose innermost desire for fulfilling the needs and the sense of belongingness to her family members appears deeply rooted in her mind. She had a strong notion regarding her martial relationship with her husband that, if she interferes with some of the major family matters might result a chasm which would remain unhealed between their relationship:

It was she who was attuned to what a marriage and what a husband required. To separate, that was the thing, separate -- one had to know how to keep things separate. What one thought, felt. What one said, what one did. They should have no bearing on one another. In watertight compartments, each one, each with a separate function. The minute you began to connect one with the other-- finished. (Listening Now, 339)

She discovers that her authoritative stance is undesirable and is futile for her, as the egoistic approach and patriarchal pride of her husband has led her to remain inferior and subordinated under her husband's supremacy. Shanta on the other hand misinterpreted their relationship and the dominancy by saying:

'Rukmani is graceful and also wise in convincing her husband. What did Appa know of Amma. He did not know how Amma manipulated him in her quite, unassuming fashion. Amma let him believe that he made rules and the decisions. She let him make his speeches, but when it came to the crunch, she had her way so easily that did not even know that it was her way.' (Listening Now,187)

From this recognition it is quite pivoting within her, as she continued to perform her role tirelessly as wife. She identified that the necessity for accepting and abiding with her present conditions to tackle, rather than brooding over the past. She became the perfect epitome of a typical woman, who respects tradition and abides to the patriarchal norms of husband's dominance. For most part of the life, Rukmani compromised herself with the things that are lively happening in front of her eyes and remained simply a plain and passive woman. The external factors and circumstances had no effect on her, nor to distract or lose her composure, since she passed most part of the life as a woman who uses silence as the suitable weapon to defend herself from chaos and confusion, in order to thrive herself as a successful wife, who preserves order and peace in marital life:

"if there was a rightful place in marriage for anything, that if there was anything a woman could legitimately bring into marriage besides her children, that was her silence. Nothing could thrive without her silence - not her husband, not her children, not her marriage." (Listening Now, 340).

Even though her passivity is an appealing feat from her perspective, she cannot make her existence in the sphere of familial relationship into something meaningful, in order to showcase her value towards the other. She loves her husband and remains subordinated for the rest of her life. Rukmani avoided from sharing her feminine issues and the pain with her husband. According to her husband's view, miscarriages and periods were merging into one another, which he believes it to be a woman's problem and never shouldered his responsibility to aid her in any possible way:

"...that's what it was for which she once in a while took to bed. On the rare occasions when she stayed in bed for more than one day, He expressed concern. If it truly caused Him concern then why did He not stop doing it to her? Why did he think what He did was divorced from what she suffered? No, no, she was asking the wrong question: why did He think. The significance lay in the answer: He did not. (Listening Now, 392)

Her intention to remain a 'good wife' with no signs of rebellious instinct against her husband or her family, made her to cling tightly with her marital relationship. However she made a bold and courageous act of saving Padma's life, when Rukmani came to know about premarital sexual affair. Rukmani's husband was furious upon knowing this and threatened her instead of appreciating, by saying:

'Next time you go, you can stay with her.' (Listening Now, 341)

This led Rukmani from supporting her daughter. This eventually led to a bitter and tragic chain of events, ruining Padma's life, who expected her mother to come for her aid. In order to save her marital bondage with her husband resulted in Rukmani becoming a cruel and unsympathetic mother in the eyes of Padma. Shanta's story expresses a similar sort of story exploring the miseries faced by a married woman, who is alienated in her own house. This particular character in the novel renders sympathy and dissatisfaction in the readers mind. Her depiction in the novel by Anjana was a mentally deranged woman who remains deeply struck by unfulfilled urges and desires. She believes that she is constrained with many limitations breaking down her strengths, dreams and potentials. She wanted to lead a life of fantasy and romance; however the reality appeared to be uncannily different from the actual expectations, as Anjana has showcased the angst of a wife as:

'It is felt as through her body, like the vessels cooked in, contained boiling oil to which a little water had been added, her thoughts were hundreds of scalding drops springing up and sputtering and beneath, and beneath the fire burn on.'(Listening Now, 159)

She dreamt of a happy and lovely wedded life in her youth. When her brother asked her, about her future plans, she replied with a simple tone that:

'I wanted to go to college, then get married to a nice man with a good job, have a large house and garden and have two children.' (Listening Now, 214)

She firmly believed that her parental home is not a suitable place for her to live harmoniously after her marriage. She declined to solemnize the fantasy of seeking romantic hero, in a similar manner as displayed in typical love stories which she used to read. To her dismay, she became to understand the reality of marriage and its intricacies:

Get married, then you'll settle down, Amma used to say to her, to Madhav, to Padma. Settle down. What was so settling about marriage? The only thing settling was the surface, only the surface was calm and content, one even took on the expression of other married women, then mannerism their conversation, one stopped being a girl and became a woman, and this was no gentle blossoming, but instead, an unseen withering. One stopped asking questions about life and love and relationships as in college days; instead one lived it in ways, never imagined before. (Listening Now, 168)

V. SHANTA AND NARAYANA'S RELATIONSHIP: A TYPICAL STEREOTYPIC PROJECTION OF A HUSBAND AND WIFE

Upon realizing that her husband Narayana remains entirely different from her fantasy hero, as he is plain and ordinary looking man, who is insensitive to Shanta's emotions:

"Her dream-lover, whom she had sustained all her life, and who had sustained her till she got married, was now long dead..." (Listening Now, 162)

She is quite frustrated, as it is unbearable for her to imagine her husband remaining unsighted and inaudible to her romanticized love cravings. Her sense of being isolated altered the entire conception over 'marriage' which evidently results only in distress, agony and pain. In her case, it is due to Shanta's abnormal and intense passion resulted in emotional outburst of her temper, complicating her marital life, which abruptly resulting in petty expectations from her husband, which eventually makes unhappy. On the bright side, she was thankful to God for getting a husband who has a good heart as she pleads for apology:

'Krishna, Krishna, thank you, forgive me, I'll never complain about him again.' (Listening Now, 172)

Which is Ironically,

'...a promise that she broke easily and repeatedly' (Listening Now, 172).

However she feels dissatisfied in certain occasions towards him. She finds him to be more kind and considerate over woman:

"When Padma had been with them and had a bout of flu, Narayana had said to her, "Rest properly, Padma." Shanta had said to Narayana that day, "You would never have said, Rest, Shanta, if I was sick, would you?" (Listening Now, 168)

Narayana replies without even thinking with a cool and simple reply, that:

"There's no point asking you to rest, you never will," (Listening Now, 168)

Such replies tend to enervate her anger, which eventually builds up emotional stress in her mind. Shanta thinks that marriage incapacitates woman from exerting her to act freely and cannot utter words from the emotional standpoint, as it could cause unnecessary problems and skirmishes within the husband-wife relationship:

'Control yourself, Shanta, control yourself. Even now, after all these years, she continued to hear her mother's voice, the refrain of her childhood...It was a preparation of marriage and motherhood; her mother could not help saying it any more than she could help being born a woman. Shanta had raged against her mother, but now there was no one to rage against. Now no one said it to her, now she could not blame on anyone.... Control yourself, Shanta, control yourself. Now she knew her mother's words, now they were ground into her bones. She saw how they sat easily on every other woman, she saw that was the only thing to be done. Yet this knowledge changed nothing. Her anger and guilt burned on.' (Listening Now, 169)

VI. MADHU: A WOMAN WHO IS ENTANGLED WITHIN THE EMOTIONAL COBWEBS

Madhu, on the other hand is quite fixated over the feeling that her husband is a righteous and good man. She wanted to express her anger in certain way towards him by ignoring him entirely. These acts were ineffective over him, and she often tries to attain self pleasure through imagining her husband to be the best thing in her life as she manages to showcase a false impression towards other, by expressing herself to be self contented and cheerful in her own ways. She says to Padma that:

"In my previous life itself I must have done something good, otherwise why I am so much in this life?. I am so lucky, Padma, He loves me so much, see how He takes care of me, two houses he has built for me, so many sarees and jewellery he has given me." (Listening Now, 79).

However the sexual disenchantment tends to enrage her mind in certain occasions. However she remains ignorant of them, by saying:

"Why ask for something that could only be given if it was there? He needs his release, bas. If that was what it was, then who was she to want more? Who was she to feel bereft every time it happened?" (Listening Now, 68)

She accepts the reality and tries to merge herself, and act happily, even if she had certain expectations with managing her private moments with her husband. She never attempted with any sort of precautionary actions for avoiding the succession of abortions, which ruined her health. Certain acts of her husband dissuading on her interest to complete her under graduation has made her feel dejected and disappointed. In order to cope with such insensitive actions, she imagines that her husband loves her and always wanted herself to be fulfilled by him. Such sort of belief and inherent faith by Indian women appears common throughout the nation:

"Yesterday only I told Him, I think I will complete my B.A.,...and he laughed and said, B.A., She-A, Ph.D., T-hd, what will you do with it? You are a wife, you are a mother, That is a full-time job. Even if I die, with my business, investments, insurance and all, you can marry off the children, and there will be enough to live on the rest of your life. I don't know Padma, Why he loves me so

much, he treats me like a doll, thinking, a little bit of work I will do and I will break".... what will I get out of B.A. now." (Listening Now, 61)

VII. ANURADHA: A WOMAN WHO EXHIBITS RESILIENCY AGAINST THE BITTER MARITAL BONDAGE

Unlike Shantha, Anuradha could not entirely adapt herself to the unending difficulties and towards confronting over the harsh realities over marital bondage. After Anuradha's departure from her parent's house and begins living with her husband.

She has a strong feeling that she is an irremediable exile:

She had been prepared for changes. What she hadn't been prepared for was for feeling that she was a stranger in her own house. She had not been prepared for loneliness that swept her so completely. She who came from a large family of several brothers and sisters and knew what it was to give and receive love, had not been prepared for an absence of love at a time when she was so willing to give it. (Listening Now, 120)

Her feeling of being victimized from the cultural practices and familial customs enrages her at certain point. In order to satisfy the growing demands and to abide to certain familial customs that were demanded from her husband and family, she was forced to provide heavy dowry. She feels that marital ties have spun a inescapable web, which has trapped her from enjoying her desires. She limits herself from petty desires and restricts certain needs after her marriage. Her self-identity faded with growing time, as her interpersonal relationship are mainly towards catering the family members, rather than an intimate and harmonious manner. In order to cope with financial sustenance, her husband made hard decisions, by telling her that:

'Hereafter we will have to have fewer expenses' "(121) and all that she could do is to cut down her extravaganza. She gave up her nightly glass of milk and stopped taking ghee in her food stopped eating fruits and set less dahi because she didn't eat dahi. She stopped having sugar in her tea except in the morning - that she still had, that she looked forward to His return from the office. She dispensed with the dhobi (Listening Now, 121-2)

Even under such circumstances, she recalled some of the happy moments that she cherished during the time of wedding.

'Marriage was a joy.' (Listening Now, 118)

VIII. CONCLUSION

The paper attempted in exploring the intricate elements and the various ways of depicting the man-woman relationship in contemporary society. The study delved deeper into the crux of contemporary realism, as the modernity started to gain momentum, with women subjugation and male chauvinistic acts were not entertained. This transgression has led to conflicts and controversies. People tend to be fixated with their own perspective, rather than exploring the reality. This has led to emergence of man-woman relationships being viewed under modernistic ideals, and also from the traditional perspective. This led to bifurcation in the society, with one group of people following the modern virtues and the other group following the age old customs that were devised by our ancestors. This was beautifully examined by Anjana and has delivered with an artistic tone in this novel.

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