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## **The Internal Landscape and the Existential Agony of Women in Anjana Appachana's Novel**

***LISTENING NOW***

**A Doctoral Dissertation**

**M. Poonkodi, Ph.D.**

**THE INTERNAL LANDSCAPE AND THE  
EXISTENTIAL AGONY OF  
WOMEN IN ANJANA APPACHANA'S NOVEL  
*LISTENING NOW***

By  
M. POONKODI

A Thesis submitted to Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science  
and Higher Education For Women (Deemed University),  
Coimbatore in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2006

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled " **THE INTERNAL LANDSCAPE AND THE EXISTENTIAL AGONY OF WOMEN IN ANJANA APPACHANA'S NOVEL LISTENING NOW**" submitted to Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore for the award of the **DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH** is a record of original research work done by **M.POONKODI** during the period of her study in the Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore under my supervision and guidance and the thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award to the candidate of any Degree / Diploma / Associateship / Fellowship or similar title to any candidate of any university.

Dr.R.S.Parvathi

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the matter embodied in this thesis titled" "**THE INTERNAL LANDSCAPE AND THE EXISTENTIAL AGONY OF WOMEN IN ANJANA APPACHANA'S NOVEL LISTENING NOW**" submitted to Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore is the result of investigation carried out by me in the Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore under the guidance and supervision of Dr.R.S.Parvathi M.A., Dip.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D., Reader, Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute For Home Science and Higher Education For Women (Deemed University), Coimbatore, and it has not been submitted for the award of any Degree / Diploma / Associateship / Fellowship or similar title to any candidate of any university.

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## **PREFACE**

The Joy of writing lies in discovering truths that are otherwise often elusive. With my characters, I embark on a journey that is unpredictable as it is exhilarating. I may think I know them before I begin, but often they prove me wrong, doing and saying things that take me by surprise. They create my story by being who they are. Therefore, for me, writing is an act of discovery.

\_\_ Anjana Appachana

Anjana Appachana is undoubtedly one of the famous women writers in Indian English, exploring in her maiden novel Listening Now, the nebulous and

fastidious labyrinths of existential psyche of women who are trapped in the universe of absurdity.

The novel Listening Now, which brought overwhelming international reputation to Anjana Appachana has failed to set a stage for much criticism unlike Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things. In this literary climate, the researcher has taken the most challenging task of studying the cluster of Anjana Appachana's women characters from existential perspective for her doctoral degree.

A perceptive reading of Anjana's novel shows that Anjana as an Indian woman writer, has probed into the landscape of the Indian women's psyche to discover that they are victimized by their own preposterousness. She sympathizes with these women who have made their lives tragic wastes due to their anxiety to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. Anjana envisions and proposes a milieu wherein women realize the significance of using the freedom to choose and make their lives happy, joyful and most importantly meaningful. Thus she suggests an alternative picture of reality that she has projected in her novel.

The dissertation entitled "The Internal Landscape and The Existential Agony of Women in Anjana Appachana's Novel Listening Now" studies Anjana Appachana's women characters and substantiates that they are existentialists and that Anjana holds the beliefs of existential thinkers, in major Sartre's and Camus'.

## **Objectives of the Study**

1. To evaluate major women novelists in Indian writing in English with specific reference to Anjana's literary achievements and her focus on psychic conditions of women.
2. To study the history and major concepts of the philosophy of Existentialism.
3. To evaluate the technique of writing adopted by Anjana Appachana in the context of existentialism.
4. To discuss the existential predicaments of the protagonist, Padma.
5. To study the existential characteristics of wives and mothers portrayed in the novel Listening Now.

## **6. Data for the Study**

Listening Now written by Anjana Appachana

## **Methodology Adopted**

The methodology advocated by MLA handbook for writers of Resource Papers, Sixth edition has been followed for the purpose of Documentation, End notes and Quotation and Bibliography.

## **Significance of the Study**

The thesis is the result of an attempt to analyze the lacerated psyche of the protagonist and the other women characters especially the wives and mothers

entrapped in domesticity by probing into the philosophy of existentialism as propounded by Jean- Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

### **Plan of the Study**

Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus believe that man makes his own life. Anjana Appachana also holds their believes and demonstrates that women make or mar their own lives psychically in the absurd domestic world.

An analysis and deduction is attempted in the study undertaken. For this purpose an extensive distribution of thesis over five chapters is presented.

Chapter I Introduction

Chapter II Existential Thinkers and Their Concept of Human Existence

Chapter III The Protagonist and Her Existential Predicaments

Chapter VI The Existential agony of Wives and Mothers in Anjana's Novel

Chapter VII Conclusion

**Chapter I** throws light on the evolution of Indian Writing in English as a new and an independent discipline. It discusses the emergence of women novelists in that discipline and evaluates some of their works, highlighting Anjana Appachana's literary achievements as a short story writer and as a novelist.

Anjana's novel, apparently at the outset is about Padma, a single woman living with her girl child, born out off wedlock. Nevertheless it also focuses on her friends and family members whose stories are entwined with hers. Padma's secret

story of love and her cosseted life that Anjana addresses as a "terrible tragic waste" cannot be read without viewing the internal landscapes of her mother, sister, daughter and her friends. Their stories are the descriptive portraits of Indian families- joint and nuclear bearing sensational and secret memoirs of their lives accentuating their existential predicaments.

**Chapter II** is the result of a broad survey of the philosophy and its origin, major thoughts, proponents and literary connection that is made for a better understanding of Anjana as an existentialist.

Existentialism, which spread rapidly over Europe after the First World War, is a movement associated with philosophy, religion and literature. It has man on the center stage and emphasizes his existence and not his essence. It believes that he is the only known animal who defines himself through the act of living. It deals with his psychic conditions construed during his venture to discover himself and his potentialities. It drives into our minds that he makes himself out of his conditions.

Jean-Paul Sartre is considered to be the representative of existentialism. In his philosophical essays, novels, short stories and plays he investigates the psychological problems of life and diagnoses that Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. For him, human life is a futile one and the human being's presence in the world is irrational and absurd. Choice is at the core of Sartrean philosophy.

Standing very close to the philosophical outlook of Sartre is Albert Camus. According to him the realization of the absurdity of human existence is a necessary condition for accomplishing anything in life and that is fundamental concept in all his philosophical and literary works. He shows existentialistic views through The Myth of Sisyphus. Sisyphus is punished to push a huge stone up a hill. He finds amusement in it and does not see it as a punishment for him. In choosing to change his punishment into amusement, Sisyphus is an existentialist.

This chapter makes a brief study thematically and technically of women characters to prove that they are existentialists. It focuses on the varied and extensive techniques adopted by the novelist to manifest the existential cries and the agony of her women characters. It makes an attempt to study the plot, narrative technique, structure, symbolism and imagery, language and style of her only novel. It also emphasizes the writer's success in the juxtaposition of two contradictory elements of realism and fantasy in order to underscore the fragmented selves of the women characters.

Listening Now is about Padma's love story which forms the crux of the novel giving rise to six other stories narrated by six women and one of those is by Padma herself. The stories strung together give a peculiar touch to the plot and structure of the novel. Like Anita Desai, Anjana uses pertinent imagery, Indianised English terms, interior monologues, flashback and stream-of-consciousness techniques to spotlight the complexities of human nature, the warping of

individuals' mindsets, their ephemeral shifts to their own fantasy world and their craving for significant and sensible existence in the present.

**Chapter III** deals with the protagonist, Padma who faces the spiteful assaults of existence as a single woman. Padma is subjected to extreme psychological pressures that emerge due to her single status. She passes through various stages of existential dispositions and finally attains complacent nature which signifies her movement from stagnation to a progress.

Initially she camouflages her identity as an unwed mother, feigning widowhood to her neighbours and a married woman to the society and her male colleagues. But the exterior conversion does not give her any relief. Instead it augments her existential predicaments that have their impact upon her child, Mallika and the people around her. She isolates herself from the society, turns rebellious but finds no comfort in being so. Gradually she gives up her boldness, becomes remorseful and also very apprehensive of her future. In the final stage it is her daughter who becomes responsible for taking a crucial decision. Padma determines to live alone. Anjana Appachana makes a perfect record of the emotional turbulence, unceasing tears, perpetual silence, indifferent ideologies, obsession with death and chaos of her protagonist who undergoes the existential problems of loneliness and vacuum feelings.

**Chapter IV** explores the frayed psyche of married women playing their roles as wives and mothers in domestic drama of absurdity.

Anjana's chief concern is to portray Indian women who believe that they have been entangled in absurdity existing in the form of routine and mechanical work. Their consciousness of it brings them inexplicable woes and miseries pertaining to their existence. They strive to seek meaning in their life which they do not attain even after prolonged attempts. The situations become worse for them and they undergo all kinds of traumas. They take great efforts to grasp the absurd world into which they are thrown. Unfortunately, all their efforts turn into confrontations between them and their surrounding, stimulating uncanny thoughts that there can be no escape from the domestic world and that they are alone and isolated.

This Chapter also discusses the controversies and complexities that arise due to the women characters' perception of loneliness and estrangement. They suffer due to the anxiety and despair, the twin tenets of existentialism that complicate the inter-personal relationships, aggravate their emotions and enhance the chasms existing between them and their kindred. They shuttle between the present and the past and also shift their mind from realism to fantasy not knowing where to stand and what to do and finally they learn to live in the chaotic universe finding no answers to their existential queries and quandaries; traumas and tribulations.

**Chapter V** sums up the evaluation of Anjana's women characters from existential point of view followed with the message that she tries to convey through the depiction of her characters and the treatment of her existential themes.

Anjana's desire is to make women conscious of their existential conditions. Single women like Padma, though conscious of the choices that shall make their life meaningful do not use the freedom to choose in the right context. Anjana shows much concern for the married women who are entangled in the absurd situations existing in the form of prearranged domesticity where in they are under obligations to sacrifice their selves, limit their freedom and remain forgetful of the choices. She wishes that women come out of their existential conditions and make their life meaningful and worth living.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Indian Writing in English as an Independent Discipline

It is without doubt, since the days of British rule, English is the Language of domination, status and privilege in India. The colonial project in India was to create and maintain a class of administrative officers, clerks and compliant civil servants to carry-out the task of ruling the vast and expansive sub-continent.

In the words of Lord Macaulay, a member of the Supreme Council in India, the task of British in India was to “... do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”<sup>1</sup> It was due to his efforts, a British-Styled Education, conducted principally in English was imparted to the Indians. Soon many Indians attempted to master English, realising the usefulness of the language. Gradually there started a new wave to make English a means of expression to present the Indian thought more clearly to the British .

The use of English was essentially an inevitable necessity for the natives to communicate with their British rulers. They made their requests and appeals to authorities in English and lodged their complaints with the police in English. Their expression that was factual, non-fictional soon blossomed into creative writing in

English fragrant enough to be attractive and enduring, even before the Indian freedom movement had had an impact on the literary impulses.

The birth of Indian writing in English was the manifestations of the period of metamorphosis from medieval to modern, from blind faith to rational thinking, from credulous acceptance to scientific questioning and the very rise of science itself. It was also a period of political awareness, social reformation and religious reappraisal.

Many young patriots who were gifted with the art of expression utilized, English language as a device to fight against the authority of British. Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda as writers of prose, Henry Derozio, Tagore, and Aurobindo as both poets and prose writers were using literary genres of their choice to politicize, spiritualise and socialize their yearnings to invigorate their dull country to be expressive in their emotion and active in their working. Simultaneously writers like Mulkraj Ananad, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan were speculating on Indian situations and dealing with the social issues like "superstitions, casteism, poverty, illiteracy and many other social evils that were eating the vitals of Indian society"<sup>2</sup> in their English novels and short stories. The patriots' effort in the English language that commenced in the year 1904 with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Rajmohan's Wife was in the experimental stage and they were using the language only with regrets and apologies. P.K.Singh quotes in his introduction to R.K.Narayan's novels that "almost every article in

Indo - Anglican writing begins with an apology for the writer who prefers to use English for the expression of their creative genius."<sup>3</sup> Later writers began to crave for recognition for their literary capabilities which they attained after large creations of novels and short stories. Meenakshi Mukerjee in her contention, vividly expatiates the detail that the writers output carried not only patriotic fervour but also the faculty of imagination and expression, the quintessence of literature.

The most interesting aspect in the modern history of Indian English Literature, is the emergence of men and women novelists, creating a notable sensation all around the world with their award winning works of arts. Some of those who have given a "new tone, tenor and content to Indian fiction in English include Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan J.Sealy, Geeta Mehta and Arundhati Roy ..." <sup>4</sup> Not to forget some of the writers belonging to Indian Diaspora like Rohinton Mistry, Naipaul, Anjana Appachana, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpha Lahiri .

## **1.2 An Evaluation of Women Novelists in Indian English**

When we examine the issue of women's writing in India we notice that in the beginning of twentieth century there were only a handful of women writers like Sarojini Naidu, and Toru Dutt giving importance to English poetry. There was hardly any English fiction written by Indian women.

Things began to change for them after India's independence in the year 1947. The first generation of important women writers Kamala Markandaya and Nayantra Sahgal, began publishing their fictions in the 1950s. Kamala Markandaya, the author of ten novels first published Nectar in a Sieve in the year 1954. Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Possession, A Handful of Rice, The Coffers Dams, The Nowhere Man, Two Virgins, The Golden Honeycomb, and Pleasure City are her other novels.

Most of her works reflect the love and respect she has for India. Though married to a British citizen she has not given up the Indianess within her. In all her novels she has manifested her awareness of the social problems and concern for the down trodden people. The titles of her novels such as Rice and Monsoon and Handful of Rice show her knowledge about agriculture and Indian farmers. In The Nectar in a Sieve Kamala Markkandeya gives importance to the farmers' problems in India. It is the farmers who toil in the hot sun and harvest rice but the most profited are the landlords and the financiers. The farmers do not get their share of rice. In the same novel Kamala expresses her concern for women. Rukmani represents the illiterate and helpless women who are victimized by the cruel and injustice social order existing in rural India.

Kamala's next novel Silence of Desire is a family drama that highlights the conflict existing between a husband and a wife. Dandekar is a self-possessed government servant. His wife Sarojini is a house wife who firmly believes that all her

physical and mental sufferings can be cured by the saints whom she worships as Gods. She frequently and also secretly visits the temple to meet a fake saint and that makes her husband to doubt her conduct. When he finds out the truth he officially takes steps to vacate the saint from the temple. He also helps his wife to understand that science and medicine can cure her disease.

In Some inner fury, Kamala shows the conflict between the east and the west and also the kind of complexities involved in the inter-personal relationship. Kitsami who is educated at Oxford University is addressed as Kit and he is an ardent follower of western culture while his wife Pramela, sister Mirabai and brother Govind are true Indian patriots with whom he persistently has fights. Pramela is portrayed as a true Hindu wife who dislikes fashions, clubs, tennis and anything related with western culture. She is an embodiment of obedience, devotion and dedication. She sacrifices her life during her attempt to protect the school from burning. Mirabai gives much importance to her country and country men. When she is asked to make a choice between her lover Richard, an Englishman and her nation, her patriotic sense overpowers her love and she rejects Richard.

In Two Virgins, Kamala touches upon her favourite theme of confrontation of East and West again. In Possession, the author expresses her anti-patriarchal rage through the character, Lady Caroline Bell. Caroline is a domineering and tyrannical possessor and an active victimizer of an adolescent male. In the words

of H.M. Williams, Caroline is a “monster of possessiveness.”<sup>5</sup> Kamala Markandaya is considered to be a pioneer member of Indian Diaspora and her best novel, The Nowhere Man portends many Diasporic issues with which Bharathi Mukerjee, Chitra Bannerjee and Jumpha Lehari are preoccupied with today. Her novels are better known for the sensitive creation of individual characters and situations which are simultaneously representative of a larger collective.

Nayantra Sahgal, a writer with a strong political background, voices forth her deep sense of nationalistic feelings in her earlier works. Later, her personal life and the bitter marital experiences compel her to reflect them in her novels. Her women characters are individuals remaining independent within the framework of society into which they are born. It is to be noticed that Nayantra's feminine attitude "is closer to writers like Simon de Beavouir and much lesser writers like Betty Friedon and Katy Millet."<sup>6</sup> Sehgal's first novel A Time to be happy emphasizes upon man's duty to the family and society.

In Day in Shadow Nayantra gives a vivid account of a single woman, Smirit's suffering in society. The sufferings and loneliness that mellow Nayantra have been brought forth with profound intensity in this novel. Smirit looks like a liberated woman who has the courage to break a long relationship which has become meaningless with no sense of companionship between husband and wife. Ironically, she opts for a divorce when already another male support is awaiting her outside marriage. She walks out of the sheltered world of Som not to live a life

of her own but to step into the shadow of another chauvinist, Raj. Smirit remains only a stereotype submitting herself to Raj's idea of patriarchy.

In Rich Like Us that won her the Sinclair Prize for fiction in the year 1985, she transcends the personal introverted world of The Day in Shadow. The incidents of the novel are based on the period of Emergency during 1974-75 when the parliament and constitutional rights were suspended. As far as the woman's experience is concerned, the novel presents it along the lines of feminist ideology. The main character, Ram goes to England and courts Rose without disclosing the fact that he is already married and has a wife and a child in India. He mesmerizes Rose and persuades her to marry him. He least pays attention to the agony of his wives and develops new relationship with different women. He quotes anecdotes from religion and myths as excuses for being polyandrous. The women in this novel are certainly conscious of the injustice done to them by man, but habit makes them willing captives in this world of exploitation and injustice.

Anita Desai is one of the most famous writers of 1960. She is the author of eight novels, including the internationally acclaimed Clear Light of Day and In Custody. Most of Desai's novels are set in India and completely immersed in Indian life. Her special focus is upon the inner life of her characters and her concern is towards the people previously marginalized in Indian fiction, primarily women, children and the elderly.

According to Desai, writing is a process of "exploration of language: how much can language do, how far can it pretend human experience and feelings."<sup>7</sup> In all her novels as observed by Dr. Shashi Pal, she proves to be an "obsessive existentialist"<sup>8</sup> dealing with the inner psyche of women that existentially suffer. In Cry, The Peacock, Maya is married to an older man, a detached, industrious lawyer. She is a hypersensitive woman. The untimely death of her pet dog disturbs not only her mind but also her marital life. Voices in the City presents an account of the problems faced by two world-weary women doomed to reside in Calcutta. Monisha finds her life to be empty and meaningless. Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness. The lack of privacy, her sterility and the absence of love make her a pathetic figure. Her younger sister, Amla is an extrovert who takes all life in her stride. She wishes to lead a joyful life with the painter Dharma but very soon finds out that her life is hollow and futile. Sita in Where Shall We go This Summer? is a hyper sensitive, over emotional, middle-aged woman, expecting the fifth child. She suffers due to marital incompatibility and intends to escape to the island of illusion. She feels alienated from her husband and is not able to understand at times the behaviour of her four children. Her sufferings make her to conclude that her marriage and all human relationship are just a farce. Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain after a fretful life of her youth turns to be an introvert. She lives like a recluse, cutting herself off from human concerns entirely, and even the arrival of her grand-daughter is treated as an

unwelcome interference by her. She creates a world of fantasy and lives in it withdrawing herself from the harsh realities of life.

Shashi Deshpande and Shoba De are writers belonging to the second generation and they too like their seniors, write about the trials and tribulations women face in the Indian Society. Shashi Deshpande was born in the early part of twentieth century. But she began her literary career only in the year 1970. She believes that men and women write differently:

I think it is very clear that my own writing is very much a woman's writing. I think just one little example, the beginning of That Long Silence for example: it's a very stark beginning at the same time it uses a metaphor of childbirth for the act of writing. It uses the idea of looking into mirrors to speak of different images. I somehow feel that anybody who reads this would know this is a woman writing.<sup>9</sup>

All her short stories and novels concentrate on women, marriage, domestic situation and family relationship. However, her primary concern is to explore woman's psyche. The Dark Holds No Terror, That Long Silence, The Binding Vine, Roots and Shadows and A Matter of Time express her feminist views. Indu, the protagonist of her first novel Roots and Shadows realizes that it is impossible to assert her selfhood. She hates her mother who shows gender difference in her treatment of her son. She escapes from her parental home and

gets married. Marriage becomes another enclosure that restricts her movement towards self-realization. The novel That Long Silence is a critique of Indian social situations like marriage and family that stifle the growth and free expression of the individuals. Jaya, the protagonist of this novel tries to erase women's long silence and grapple with her own problems of self-revelation and self-assessment through her writings.

Bharathi Mukerjee can very well be termed as an authority in the field of immigrant literature that flourished in the year 1970. The life that Bharathi experienced in her husband's country, Canada is the source for many of her novels: "The experience of cutting myself off from a biological homeland and settling in an adopted homeland that is not always welcoming to its dark-complexioned citizens has tested me as a person, and made me the writer I am today."<sup>10</sup> As the author of Jasmine, Tiger's Daughters, Wife, Leave It to Me and The Holder of the World, Mukerjee explores the contemporary culture.

The women characters in Mukerjee's novels face innumerable problems meant exclusively for expatriates. They take great efforts to adapt to American society and in that process they discover that they are rootless. Tara in The Tiger's Daughter absorbs American attitude towards life and rejects anything that is related with India. Dimple in the novel Wife aspires for freedom and love in marriage and this desire brings her anger, grief and resentment. Though she lives in America she has no immigrant problems. She criticises her husband when he is

taking efforts to acclimatize to American way of life. In Jasmine Mukerjee talks about a young Indian widow moving to America seeking employment. In America she makes compromises that are essential to stamp her feet strong and for ever.

Shobha De, a writer more accustomed to upper class society has published seven extremely successful novels and in all her novels she handles the themes that are considered as taboos for women writers. She says she has chosen writing as her career only for the joy that she receives: "Nothing is that important to me careerwise, there are no goals I'm feverishly working towards, no ambition that I'm going to kill myself for. I'm doing what I enjoy and at this stage of my life it's what I want to do."<sup>11</sup> In all her novels Shobha De writes about high society in Bombay.

In Socialite Evening her women characters belong to affluent families- unconventional and highly sophisticated in their way of life, and interested in extra marital sexual affairs. But their position as women only bring them certain sexual hardships. The novel Sisters deals with two women's frustration and their inability to fulfill their desires. The Snapshots is about men and women who believe in breaking the norms of the society.

Arundhati Roy, is a writer belonging to recent literary era having created a great sensation all around the world with her only novel The God of Small Things published in 1997. The God of Small Things, has won Britain's premier book prize, the Booker McConnell, in 1997. Thematically, linguistically and technically speaking about the novel, it is the author who comes to the fore front,

predominantly exposing her intellectual capacity. Born in 1961 in Bengal and growing up in Kerala has helped Arundhati Roy to comprehend Kerala's social structure and political grounds and express them in a new style of language: "Roy's work undoubtedly deconstructs the hidden ideology of patriarchal society that moulds a woman making a frontal attack on long-revered traditional assumption about women. It questions and disturbs the hegemony and social hierarchy."<sup>12</sup>

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri belong to Indian Diaspora and their literatures are the outcome of diasporic consciousness – a unique feeling emanating in the mind of people who go through an avalanche of anguishes and emotions while taking efforts to acclimatize to new cultural environment.

The immigrant writer Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni has an obsession with the common plight of immigrants, especially Indian women's modern maladies of exile, loneliness, bewilderment, dislocation and loss of identity and she treats them as her subjects for factual discussion and imaginative expressions in her poetry and fiction. Meanwhile it cannot be denied that her immigrant literature is replete with the details of her indigenous experiences she has had in India before her arrival to United States.

Chitra Bannerjee's humanitarian perception is mostly responsible for the expression of her creativity. In her recent novel Sisters of My Heart she delineates Calcutta household in its 1970s and 1980s. All the characters in this novel learn to live for others. Love and tolerance are the twin tenets binding the Indian families

together. Chitra Bannerjee finds Indian women to cherish great love and a sense of fortitude for their family and friends inspite of their sufferings and hardship, faced in the patriarchal society. They attach much importance to their roles as wives and mothers.

In her anthology of short stories, Arranged Marriage, she talks about Indian women caught between two worlds - the traditional world that insists that they must remain hangers-on of their husbands and the new world that upholds individual's liberty and privacy. Door is one such story that talks about a character, Preeti, who faces a dilemma whether to adapt to foreign culture or to remain an Indian in America. She takes hold of certain demeanours, exclusively meant for westerners, like privacy and retaining a space to herself with no strangers not even her husband trespassing into it. She is perplexed, when she learns from her husband that he has invited his cousin to stay with them, and she immediately shows her resentment. But her husband ignores her feelings and compels her to behave like a dutiful wife. Slowly, painfully, she learns what is expected of her and adjusts to her husband's life-style.

Jumpha Lahiri is another immigrant writer widely read by westerners. Her award-winning collection of short stories titled Interpreter of Maladies is blended with sensual and sentimental details of Indian tradition and culture. "India is an inescapable presence in this strong first collection's nine polished and resonant tales,"<sup>13</sup> says, Lahiri. She explores Indianness in varying degrees in all her stories,

wherever they are set whether it is in Calcutta or the United States. Her stories are the statements of human despair, felt particularly in the institution of marriage. The story “A Temporary Matter” depicts the inner crisis of Shukumar and Shoba after the death of their premature child. The loss of it affects their relationship and they avoid each other. The situation changes when they attempt to communicate their emotions during the days of power cut. The darkness dispels the sorrow from their mind and they reconcile. The title story “Interpreter of Maladies” is a powerful sketch of human beings’ loneliness. The alienation of Mr and Mrs. Das from their cultural roots and bondages to the conventions of a different society is presented with the strong under-current of irony. Their external glamour is contrasted with their inner claustrophobia and emptiness. In “Mrs. Sen” the protagonist, Mrs. Sen comes to America after her marriage and finds herself to be a misfit in that alien society. Externally she makes half-hearted attempts to adapt herself to a new environment. But her sensitive soul craves for her home, India.

Anjana Appachana is also an immigrant writer, commended by the westerners for her realistic portrayals of uncanny women characters in her maiden novel Listening Now. Her women characters in the novel belong to the post colonial period of time starting from 1950s to 1990s and they stand in contrast with the fashionable and dynamic women depicted in her lone anthology of short stories titled "Incantations" and Other Short Stories. Anjana's main concern as a writer is to make a study of Indian women and their psyche.

### 1.3 Anjana Appachana's Literary Contribution

Anjana Appachana has to her credit one volume of short stories, Incantations And Other Short Stories (1991), and a novel, Listening Now (1998). Her first book, Incantations And Other Short Stories was published in England, the United States and India and was translated in German. Her story, “Sharmaji” was included by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West in the collection Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing. Appachana is the recipient of an O. Henry Festival Prize and a National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship. Her work has been classified by academicians as a work of art that figures on Indian English Literature and Postcolonial Literature syllabi across the world.

Anjana Appachana who lives in Tempe, Arizona, United States of America has found her 'new home', an appropriate place for her to excel in the field of creative writing. Echoing the popular phrase of Virginia Woolf on women's liberty, she says that America has given her more room and more space to write. Anjana gives preference to her writing work than to any other thing: "If you're a writer, however, your work is always considered dispensable, you're expected to put it aside for anyone and everyone, any thing and everything ..."<sup>14</sup>

For her writing is not a hobby or a "salvation from the bondage at home".<sup>15</sup> It is an ordeal that she endeavours to accomplish it with total sincerity and enthusiasm.

Anjana Appachana began her literary career as a short story writer. The anthology, "Incantations" and Other Short Stories is a collection of eight short stories dealing with various themes, all Indian -oriented. Anjana with heedful eyes has captured the microcosm of Indian society: "Politics, the inimitable Indian bureaucracy, psychology, young children behaviour like vicious, selfish children, north vs. south with its gullibility and prejudices" <sup>16</sup>

Anjana's short stories recognize the inadequacy of male-created ideologies and show a new perspective with the feminine psyche trying to redefine women's roles in the society and reassert their self-identities.

As suggested by Ellaine Showalter Anjana goes "beyond the scenarios of compromise, madness and death" <sup>17</sup> in the story "Bahu" and projects its protagonist to break free from the dependent syndrome and "discover the new world" <sup>18</sup> Bahu, after her marriage with Siddharth wishes to be alone with him, wanting "time to enjoy laughter and silence, time to discover one another." <sup>19</sup> But prolonged matrimonial ceremonies, a prejudiced and old fashioned mother-in-law, and an inefficient and unbalanced husband hamper the enjoyment of her privileged rights. She compares her premarital life with that of the post-marital period and finds the latter one incorrigible. So she determines to walk out of her marriage to enjoy "Blissful solitude, wonderful, wonderful independence." (23) Bahu's disappointment in her marital life and her boredom with routine domestic works give her courage to walk out of marriage:

Siddharth found me in the veranda and I told him that I was leaving him. He was silent for a long time. At last he asked, where will you go? I said, I'll find a place. He sat by my side on the steps. Listen, he said haltingly. I know you're tired. We'll get a servant soon. He waited for me to say something. He said , you can't go like this....

I got up. I have to pack, I said.

He caught me by the arm. Please, he said, we need to talk...

...Try and understand, he said. Abdicating your responsibilities isn't the answer.

I continued to pack....I called a taxi... I sat inside...He said, I'll wait for you. I shook my head. It began to rain as the taxi moved forward, and I breathed in deeply – at last, the smell of wet earth.(26-27)

In the story "Sharmaji" the author elevates the position of women. Miss.Das, a major character in the story, works as a personal officer in a government office with an administrative capacity. She is commanding in her tone and authoritative in the execution of her office towards her subordinates. As a fashionable married woman, Miss.Das defers the concept of binding herself to marital status. She does not intend to renew her physical appearance with emphatic and the most essential changes meant for a married Hindu women like adorning her fore head with the red paste "sindoor"(47) or wearing the sacred, yellow thread "mangal-sutra"(47) around her neck. Even after two months of her

unceremonious marriage she retains "Miss" before her name. She finds it unnecessary to intimate her colleagues of her wedding or to introduce her husband to them. Sharmaji, the male protagonist of the story is much surprised of her indifference. Unable to restrain his inquisitiveness he inquires her:

'... you must not postpone your marriage, No woman should be alone in this world ...'

'I am married'

Sharma reeled, 'Madam!'

She began to laugh.

' But madam, you are Miss Das.'

Yes. I've retained my maiden name.'

'Why?'

'Why not?'

Sharma considered. ' A woman goes into another family. She must take the name of the family.'

' I have not gone into any family. My husband and I are both working.'

Sharma stared at her. ' You are very modern.'

And that is bad?

... Oh well! He surveyed her. You don't even look married. No sindoor, no mangal sutras, no jewellery. What is this madam'

No need for all that, Sharmaji'.

Sharma shook his head in despair. 'What can I say? I suppose things are changing...' (46-7)

Miss. Das cannot be persuaded to fall in line with ordinary women of India for she is "a sensitive, intelligent woman who refuses to accept any more myths created by patriarchy."<sup>20</sup> She knows what and how she has to be.

Women characters in the stories "When Anklets Twinkle" and "The Prophecy" are very bold and courageous. They are self-possessed. They do not permit either the parents or societal organizations to interfere their ways of life. They break free from the traditional constraints to enjoy sexual liberty.

The central character Namita in "When Anklets Twinkle", an engineer by profession, has a distinct identity as a self-motivated person. At the age of twenty seven, she tells her parents she is not interested in marriage. When Surinder, a London Doctor, comes home to propose, she presents herself before him and others in an unconventional way, wearing jeans. She upsets them further, exercising her verbal freedom. That night she blasts at her parents and out rightly informs them "' Don't match make for me,' she told her parents. 'It's humiliating. I'm not on display.'" (80)

Anjana Appachana discovers through her meticulous observations that a modern woman like Namita is more sensitive to her rights of her body and feel no guilt in saying or acting so. When Namita realises that her mother has come to know of her nocturnal meetings and sexual affairs with the tenant of the house, Mr. Rao, she does not feel ashamed or guilty. Instead she stays cool and least perturbed like the typist in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land who moves around casually after her rape with no sense of embarrassment or awkwardness. Anjana never limits her communicative range instead she allows her to express her feelings. Namita loses her temper to mother's contrite and apprehensive queries regarding her morality. She rudely answers, "She knew what was she doing. She had wanted to do it."(83) When Mr. Rao proposes to her, she turns down his proposal and says in a decisive tone, much to the surprise of everybody, that she needs " 'more time to know him.' "(86) and confirms her role as the decision-maker .

Namita's sense of modernity and her rebellious attitude oppose anything that is associated with maleness and resist and reject what is considered to be feminine. Mr. Rao, whom she decides to marry is younger by one year and draws less income than she. At the time of the betrothal she speaks rules and clarifies very clearly in an authoritative tone that after marriage she shall never resign her job and it is Rao who ought to find a job in Madras where she is working. Namita resembles Elizabeth in Margaret Atwood's Life before Man. Nate, Elizabeth's

husband is afraid of her as “The Lady with the axe.”<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth’s rule-bound life makes him to muse thus: “It’s the rule that when Elizabeth cooks, Nate does the dishes. One of the many rules, subrules,.... Living with Elizabeth involves a maze of much legalities, no easier some of them are unspoken.”<sup>22</sup>

Amrita in “The Prophecy” is a teenage girl, staying in a hostel. She develops a loveless relationship with her boy friend and has sex with him just for the sake of adventure: "She did not want to get married to him after college. She didn't want to end up like her parents. She wanted adventure."(29) As she becomes pregnant, with no guilty feeling she decides to abort. It is only the thoughts of the consequence of abortion, instills a fear in her heart and not the sexual act. Amrita is a typical new woman who looks out for sensuous pleasure but is unwilling to take risk that shall affect her personal joy. After being expelled from college she compromises with the situation and readily marries a man of her father's choice and shamelessly writes a letter to her friend about her happy wedded life.

The story “Her Mother” that fetched her the O.Henry Festival prize talks about the agony of a mother whose daughter remains insensitive to her maternal love and care. Anjana captures the modern mind of a young woman who wishes to settle in a country that gives her complete freedom. She does not wish to get confined to Indian environment that restricts her movement in the name of tradition and culture.

The mother is startled to find her daughter audaciously cutting her long and beautiful hair, secretly having an affair with her sister's husband, and ostentatiously making her parents comprehend her unwillingness to return to India. The mother drafts a lengthier letter, outpouring all her motherly feelings and earnestly pleading her to come back. She fears she may forget her home and culture and get married to an American. The daughter never yields to her mother's request. The only consolation for the mother is to sustain vain hope and imagine that "her daughter would come, and she would grow her hair again"(143)

Through these characters, Anjana traces the modern attitude of women who wish to move out of darkness and passivity and enter into a more glamorous active world of their choice. They do not like to remain any longer a puppet on a string, manipulated to fit into a framework of others' expectations. They enjoy breaking all rules to receive adventure, freedom and dignity. They make mistakes but they learn from them and move forward. They never regress or withdraw into a shell. There is an urge in them to live life meaningfully.

"Incantations" is another significant story, in which one gets glimpses of Anjana's concern for women who become victims of sexual violence. Through the portrayal of Sangeeta, Anjana reveals how women's silence and their reluctance to rebel against injustice bring them great sorrows and sufferings. Sangeeta undergoes a psychic trauma due to an untoward incident that happened a couple of days prior to her marriage with Nikhil. Sangeeta gets raped by Nikhil's brother,

Abhinay but she does not want to convey this to her parents fearing that the marriage may be stopped and there by a stigma attached to her and her family. Hence she allows the nuptial ceremony with Nikhil to be solemnized. Her brother in-law, encouraged by her passiveness and silence continues to abuse her sexually even after her marriage which invokes strange ideas about her husband's normal relationship with her:

...she told me that every morning when Nikhil was away on work, Abhinay raped her and at night Nikhil did... 'Abhinay does it every single day. And, at night, after coaching him for his exams. Nikhil does the same thing. Only, Nikhil takes ten times as long because he thinks he's being patient, but it always hurts me, always, it doesn't matter how you do it...it's the same thing. Nikhil's patience only prolongs the pain, I detest them, I...' (97)

Sangeetha experiences terrible anxiety and goes to the extent of killing herself and also the gruesome brother in-law.

Listening Now is the only novel that Anjana Appachana has written in one decade of her literary career. In an article "How I learned my Art" Anjana talks about the process of writing fiction and creating characters:

The joy of writing lies in discovering truths that are otherwise often elusive. With my characters, I embark on a journey that is unpredictable as it is exhilarating. I may think I know them before I

begin, but they often prove me wrong, doing and saying things that take me by surprise. They create my story by being who they are. Therefore, for me, writing is an act of discovery. The world within - the writing world (what I inhabit) is one where I am utterly, completely free.<sup>23</sup>

Anjana's prime concern is to project the inner landscape of ordinary women with a humanitarian outlook. In her novel she gives a valid and vibrant voice to "the ordinary by showing in the ordinary all the turbulence of passion and pain, happiness and sorrow, guilt and anger"<sup>24</sup> and this has prompted women readers all round the world to identify themselves with her characters. A reviewer in "The Boston Globe" appreciates her humane sensibilities that are reflected in her novel: "The details in the lives of the women in Listening Now illuminate larger subject and the writing is in service to something greater than the novel-- a view of humanity, a sense of what is moral and everlasting."<sup>25</sup>

The novel consists of six stories, each story about the sufferings and silence of six women characters. The center story is about Padma, a college lecturer, who lives all alone with her daughter, Mallika, born out of wedlock. She conceals her true identity as an unwed mother. She pretends to be a widow to her friends and a married woman to her male colleagues as she dreads being scandalized for her position as a single parent in the society. She never makes any attempt to talk about her secret story to her friends who accidentally come to know

of it. They also maintain it a secret without detaching the love and friendship they have for her.

Padma, during her college days falls in love with her brother's friend, Karan and has premarital sex with him. She becomes pregnant. Karan promises to marry her but under the pressure of his mother marries somebody else and leaves Padma in distress. Padma decides to continue with her pregnancy and gives birth to an illegitimate child. She manages to secure a job as a lecturer in English in Delhi and with the help of her sister, Shanta and her husband, Narayan begins a new life. After a lapse of thirteen years she meets Karan who now wishes to join her and her child Mallika. Padma allows her daughter to decide whether to accept Karan in their life or not. Mallika resolves to continue to live as they have been living for all these years without him. Padma agrees to do so.

Readers learn about this love story not only from Padma but also from the other characters who happen to be her close relatives and friends. Mallika is the first person to talk about her mother and her friends' lives. She realises her mother is devoid of normal maternal instincts and hence finds a substitute for her in her aunt Shanta. Mallika's dreams and fantasy about her father as a saviour, her obsession with her childhood friendship, her contacts with her grandmother, Rukmani, her mental agony due to her mother's negligence and most importantly, the vital decision that she takes with regard to her union with her father, become one story.

Rukmani, narrates her story as a wife and a mother. She determines to support her daughter, Padma when she understands that she is pregnant with an illegitimate child. She sheds her conventional behaviour for once and opts for an abortion to save her daughter and also the family's pride from scandal mongers. When Padma stubbornly says that she would proceed with her pregnancy, Rukmani meets Karan's mother to convince her and arrange for the marriage between Karan and Padma. But Karan's mother denounces Padma and her family using abusive terms. Both Rukmani and her daughter Shanta get provoked and curse the women of Karan's family with barrenness and no birth of child, which accidentally or incidentally come to reality.

Rukmani's support to Padma is not persistent. Once when her husband expresses his disapproval of her visit to see Padma who now stays with Shanta, she decides to obey him and never makes an attempt to see her till his death. Rukmani performs her roles as a wife and a mother to her fullest satisfaction. But her children are dissatisfied with her maternal instincts and they immediately demonstrate their displeasure which psychologically upsets her. Yet her only answer or reaction to all the troubles that she faces is silence.

Shanta, Padma's sister, has a different perspective upon Padma's love story. She considers that she is the only solace for her sister and her daughter and pours limitless love and affection over them. Fortunately, her husband Narayana too stands as a crucial pillar and readily helps his sister-in law. Shanta is overwhelmed

with her husband's behaviour. Yet she finds it very difficult to control her anger towards him, for his uncaring attitude towards her. Anjana portrays Shanta as an angry and a sensitive woman suffering due to self-inflicted problems.

Anuradha, Padma's friend, comes to know about Padma's love affair through Karan's sister during a train journey. Yet she never makes an attempt to either disclose it to her friends or discuss it with Padma herself. She maintains it as a secret. This gnaws her mind and heart at times. Already she has her own domestic troubles that cause terrible anxiety.

Another friend of Padma, Madhu too has her chance of hitting upon the mysterious love story of Padma. The photo of Mallika's father that she accidentally sees, brings to her mind that she has often seen him. She is terribly shocked to understand that Padma is not a widow. Though she has an urge to talk about it with Anuradha, she resists her instinct and goes around helping her friends in distress. Madhu's also has her own marital discomforts that irritate and annoy her.

#### **1.4 Anjana Appachana's Usage of English Language.**

Anjana Appachana belongs to the category of writers who wish to “use the English language a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life.”<sup>26</sup> Anjana probes diligently into the mystery of women's sufferings and predicaments and dexterously expresses them in an alien language.

Unlike Salman Rushdie she has no specific reason to use English as the medium of expression. Rushdie is confident that English is more powerful than any other vernacular languages of India:

The prose writing--both fiction and nonfiction--created in this period [the fifty years of independence] by Indian writers working in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen "recognized" languages of India, the so-called "vernacular languages," during the same time; and, indeed, this new, and still burgeoning, "Indo-Anglian" literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books. The True Indian literature of the first postcolonial half century has been made in the language the British left behind.<sup>27</sup>

Anjana Appachana is a south Indian by birth who has been married to a north Indian and her medium of communication both at home and working place is in English. English language has become inseparable in her life that she has used it to express her imaginative skills through her fiction. In other words English has become immensely vibrant in her process of creating.

James H. Cousin in his guidelines to Indian writers insists that "Indians must be Indo- Anglian, Indian in spirit, Indian in thought, Indian in content and Indian in imagery and English only in words."<sup>28</sup>. Anjana has intensely

comprehended the necessity to be more of a writer with Indian sensibilities than being a writer who apes western ideologies and writes in English with pride and a belief that it is the only language that sustains Indian literature.

Appachana, in her novel, sets herself a complex and an ambitious task of telling the same story from the perspectives of five women and one young girl. One story becomes six, and within those are the personal dreams and the details of monotonous domestic life of the individual characters that narrate the main story. As Susan Chacko observes, "One of Appachana's strengths is dialogue, and she does some justice to the phrases, slang, and variations in English dialects in India."<sup>29</sup> Anjana uses a dialect, which shall convince not only the westerners but also the Indian women for they are able to identify themselves with the characters:

Arre, Bahurani, what colour is this tea?"

"The milk is finished, Mataji," Anu Aunty said.

"Accha. So the milk is finished. You think you can get the same amount of milk these days when the house is full of guests?"

"Mataji, I got more, but I did not expect five more people to come today. They were supposed to come the day after tomorrow."

"Yes, yes, for everything you have got an answer. Take this tea. I do not want to be poisoned. Accha, Bahurani, my hair it needs to be oiled."

Anu Aunty looked at Ma and broke into laughter.<sup>30</sup>

The terms “Arre”, “Accha” and “Yes,yes” prefixed to mother-in-law’s utterances not only sounds reproachful but also conversational in Indian style. Here the western and the Indian readers get to understand the ironic humour underlining the painful situations of a daughter-in-law. Anjana accepts that she has attuned her language to the “rhythm of my ( her ) Indian characters”<sup>31</sup> and that she cannot write in “conventional English”: “Besides, I cannot write in conventional English because my characters speak in different Indian languages – Hindi and Kannda among them—and that has been taken into account when I write down their thoughts in English.”<sup>32</sup>

Anjana unlike other women writers is not inclined to talk about feministic issues in her novel. Her interest is to project individuals’ complexities in their lives and the futility of their existence perceived totally from Indian point of view. She uses simple English, easy, suave and natural that the readers of her novel understand her capability of writing and also the feelings and emotions of the characters that she portrays in her work of art. The following is a good illustration. Rukmani’s attitude towards marriage is expressed in a simple style by Anjana:

Books, thinking, intellectualizing...where did that get you in life, what did it get you in life? Would He have been as proud of her if she read the way her children did? No, then He would have said, Why is the food cold? Did any of this get you security, wealth, happiness? Ah, yes, respect. Sometimes it got a man that . But not

for a woman. She knew. Hadn't she arranged marriages all her life? How many men had she known who when asked, said, I want a girl who has brains? Not one. Beauty they wanted, accomplishments in the kitchen and house they wanted, culture they wanted, girl from a good family they wanted. The other things—purity, humility and all they took for granted. These days even education they wanted. Should have a B.A. at least. But intellect? No. No one she knew has asked for that. Naturally not. Of what use was a woman with brains? Marriage and motherhood demanded common sense and intuition and not brains ... (345)

Anjana uses the pronoun 'He' referring to husbands throughout the novel. The capital 'H' indicates that her women portrayals willingly underestimate their feminine being and elevate their husbands' position equivalent to that of the Almighty.

A novelist responding to her instincts and interests of "attending to the qualities of Indian experiences through English has to take regional language idiom, so peculiarly Indian."<sup>33</sup> Normally while translating such idioms into English, the authors take less care and violate the basic grammatical rules of English language. Anjana does not face this problem. She skillfully exploits the strength and the flexibility of English language and renders Indian terms and idioms in coherence with the situations and style of narration. The following is an

instance to show Indian women's performance of religious rites that ignore the sentiments of girl children:

“ What is your fast and puja for, Mumma?Prabha asked, eating her third puri with enjoyment.

“ This is a fast for sons,” she replied, serving Anirudh another hot puri. Why, Mumma? Prabha looked puzzled.

“For their long life and for them to live in good health and happily,” she said going into the kitchen to turn puris.

“ Mumma,” Prabha said when she came back and served Him and mataji,”this fast is for Anirudh?”

“Yes.” She nodded and went back to the kitchen to fry the rest of the puris.

When she came back, Prabha said, “Mumma, when do you keep a fast for me?”

....

“Mumma, when do you keep a fast for me?” One tear rolled slowly down Prabha's cheek. She wipes her nose with the back of her hand, then burst into tears, trying to hold back the sounds that racked her body but unable to.(134)

The protagonist's friend Madhu in the novel Listening Now usually expresses her lethargic attitude, impatience and her sulky temperament in the

Indian style with words like "sorry-vorry"; "B.A-She-A"; "wonder-shunder"; "furniture-shurniture." Sometimes Anjana uses Hindi without translating them into English and that does not prevent even the western readers from understanding. Words that refer to relationships like "didi", "beti", "babi", "bahu", "mataji", and "mali", and expressions like "bilkul", "accha", "Arre" and commentaries like "bechari", "bewakoof" when juxtaposed with the English words in a context, convey the essential meanings.

Certain writers are accused of being "a product of two cultures and abnormal by the standards of either."<sup>34</sup> Anjana conveniently escapes from such accusation for her sensibilities are typically Indian, both traditional and modern. The flashback and the stream-of-consciousness techniques, reflect the impact of Western writings upon her. The allusions, the imagery and the symbols that she frequently mixes with the novel suggest her Indian mind. The following is a picturesque description of the morning hours and the routine domestic rituals that exclusively belong to the Indian middle class family.

She wrote about the silence in her Delhi house, a silence punctuated only by the cooker, and sometimes, over the radio, the classical music that her mother so loved. But in the Bangalore house, she wrote, that first morning, the sun rose to the sounds of her grandparents and her Shantamama chanting their morning prayers.

She described their table with the photographs and idols of Gods

with them, the smell of incense filling the house and , from outside, bird sounds wafting in. and later, the mutterings and murmurings, chimings and clinkings, cacklings and creakings, the radio blaring with Karnataka music, and in the kitchen her Ajji going clatter clatter, bang bang, her voice scolding the servants, rising and falling; in the brief lull the clinking of her Shantamama's bangles .....(503)

Her concept of marriage and the description of their humdrum life that she manifests through Mallika's narration is a realistic portrayal of Indian women and their meaningless life:

“ Then, after you marry her, you'll want to take her away from our house and our friends and from her job—to your house and there you'll make her look after your old mother and look after your sisters and their husbands when they come, and spend all her time in the kitchen. That's what you'll make her do....”(427)

Through the process of adaptation, Anjana manages effectively to convey the feel of the cultural and emotional life of the women characters to the readers of both east and west.

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- <sup>5</sup> H.M. Williams, “Victims and Virgins: Some Characters in Kamala Markandaya’s Novels” in Madhusudan Prasad,ed. Perspectives on Kamala Markandaya (Ghaziabad; Vimal Prakashan,1984)151.

<sup>6</sup> Nandita Chaudhuri, "The Sound of Women's Voices." Femina May. 1993:10

<sup>7</sup> Anita Desai, Interview with Magda Costa, SAWNET 30 June 2001. 15.08.2001 <[http://www.sawnet.org/books/writing/desai\\_interview.html](http://www.sawnet.org/books/writing/desai_interview.html)>

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Shashi Pal, "Quest for Self." Existential Dimensions: A Study of Anita Desai's Novels. ( Jaipur: Book Enclave,2002)69.

<sup>9</sup> Shashi Deshpande, " Strange -- I always find it easy," BBC World Service 14 Sep.2003 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/literature/womenwriters/deshpandey.style.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Bharati Mukherjee, "Two ways to belong in America," New York Times Sep.1996. 26 Dec. 1999 <<http://www.mojones.com/mother.jone/JF97/mukerjee.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> Shobha De, "I don't have to please anybody so don't suck upto anybody," Ashwina Vakil. Rediff Special 14 April.2001 <<http://www.rediff.com/news/feb/12shobh2.htm>>.

<sup>12</sup> Nila Shah, " Making Small Things Big: A Reading into the God of Small Things," Contemporary Indian Writings in English ed. Jaydip Singh Dodiya (New Delhi: Atlantic,2001) 77.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Chaco, Rev. of "Jumpha Lahiri" 2 May 2001 <<http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/user/sawweb/sawnet/books/jhumpalahiri.htm>>.

<sup>14</sup> A.P.Kamath, "Women Writers of Indian Diaspora Create a Big Impact," Rediff on The Net. 23 Aug. 1999 <<http://www.indianembassy.org/indianamericans.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> J. Arthur Pais, "Why should I spend an hour cooking when I could write?" Rev. of Listening Now, 8 Dec.1998 <<http://home.sprynet.com/sprynet/kavish/newfic.htm>>.

<sup>16</sup> Anjana Appachana, Incantations and Other Stories, , Rev .Penguin Books India. 1991,2 Jan.2000 < <http://ch.8m/English.htm>>.

<sup>17</sup> Ellaine Showalter,ed. The New Feminist Criticism"-Essays On Women, Literature Theory (Pantheon books, New York,1985)134.

<sup>18</sup> Showalter 134.

<sup>19</sup> Anjana Appachana, "Bahu," "Incantations" and Other Stories (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press,1992)15. All textual quotations in the section 1.3.1 are from this edition.

<sup>20</sup> Manjit Indar Singh, "Imagination and the 'Other', "Contemporary Indian English Fiction--An Anthology of Essays, ed. K.N.Awasthi (Jalandhar: ABS Publications, 1993) 8.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Atwood, Life Before Man ( Toronto: Mcclelland and Stewart bantam Ltd. 1980) 41.

<sup>22</sup> Atwood 147.

<sup>23</sup> Anjana Appachana, "How I learned My Art,". SAWNET 16 Sep1999  
<[http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/ user/ sawweb/ SawnetReview/ Listening Now](http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/user/sawweb/SawnetReview/ListeningNow)>.

<sup>24</sup> Appachana SAWNET

<sup>25</sup> Edith Milton, "Women with Men," rev. of Listening Now, by Anajana Appachana Boston Globe 3 May 1998, 16 Sep 1999<[http://www.boston.com/globe/ books/anjanaappachana/html](http://www.boston.com/globe/books/anjanaappachana/html)>.

<sup>26</sup> K.Subba Rao, Readings in Indo - Anglian Literature: A Retrospectives in English (New Delhi:Kanishka Publishers,1995)241.

<sup>27</sup> Salman Rushdie, "India and World Literature," Front Line 9 Aug. 1997, 2 May 2002 <[http://www.the-hindu.com/ fline/ fl1416/14161010.htm](http://www.the-hindu.com/fline/fl1416/14161010.htm) date 01/26/2001>.

<sup>28</sup> James H.Cousin qtd. in K.Subba Rao, 179-80.

<sup>29</sup> Anjana Appachana, Listening Now ( India Ink: NewDelhi, 1998)34. All textual quotations in the section 1.3.2 and thereafter are from this edition.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Chacko, rev.of Listening Now, by Anjana Appachana, SAWNET 16 Sep.1999 <[http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/ user/ sawweb/Sawnet Review/ Listening Now](http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/user/sawweb/SawnetReview/ListeningNow)>.

<sup>31</sup> Anjana Appachana, qtd in J. Arthur Pais, "Why should I spend an hour cooking when I could write?" Rev. of Listening Now, 8 Dec.1998  
<[http://home.sprynet.com / sprynet/kavish/newfic.htm](http://home.sprynet.com/sprynet/kavish/newfic.htm)>.

<sup>32</sup> Anjana Appachana, qtd in J. Arthur Pais

<sup>33</sup> Rao 249.

<sup>34</sup> Rao 246.

## CHAPTER 2

### Existential Thinkers and Their Concept of Human Existence

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is said by Northrop Frye that "works of literature are not created out of nothing: They are created out of literature itself."<sup>1</sup> Based on this notion it is indispensable to see Anjana's writings in the conceptual frame work that embraces Sartre's and Camus' aesthetic and philosophic contributions characterized in terms existentialism

Before detecting the system of thinking that exist in common between the creative writer Anjana and these writers of philosophy an attempt has been made

to expound the subtext of existentialism, its basis, basic theories and promoters in this chapter.

## **2.2 What is Existentialism?**

Human life has been a complex and a multifaceted reality defying conceptual formulation and hence the contemporary mind has been perennially engaged in pursuit of knowledge seeking to impose meaning on the chaos of experience, shape an orderly picture of life and evolve coherent patterns of thought from overabundance of ardent observation to comprehend man's existence.

Existence has never been an easy ordeal for man for it correlates with his struggle for survival in the universe materialistically, psychically and spiritually. The formidable tasks he has faced in life, especially during World War II has stimulated despair and frustration, set forth much difficult questions in his life about freedom and choice of freedom, incited a penchant to die and finally led to the making of a philosophy in the name of Existentialism that attained tremendous popularity in Europe, particularly in France. It is essentially associated with the condition of man, his act of living, his state of being free and the directions he takes to use his freedom in reciprocation to his wider experiences and enormous challenges he encounters in the universe that is drastically undergoing changes.

Existentialism, a sophisticated philosophy that deals with the definite attitude of looking at life, recently has been simplified and applied to all sorts of

people and activities that are tenuously connected with existentialism. It is because there is no common body of doctrine to which all existentialists subscribe. For this reason existentialism has been described by John Macquarrie “not as a philosophy but as a style of philosophizing”<sup>2</sup> It is a style that allows those who follow it to hold different convictions about the world and man’s life in it. At the same time we find a unity in their diverse thinking. They all in common belong to the family of existentialists, concentrating on some themes, commonly occurring in most of the works of art and literature. Such themes as freedom, choice, decision and responsibility are prominent in all existentialist philosophers.

The philosophy begins from man and his existence as a subject and not an object. The existentialists think passionately about man’s existence and treat him not only as a thinking subject but an initiator of action and a centre of feeling. Miguel de Unamuno’s definition to philosophy and philosophers justifies the passionate behaviour of the existentialists:

Philosophy is a product of the humanity of each philosopher, and each philosopher is a man of flesh and bone who addresses himself to other men of flesh and bone like himself. And, let him do what he will, he philosophizes not with reason only, but with the will, with the whole soul and with the whole body. It is the man who philosophizes.<sup>3</sup>

A fuller understanding of existentialist philosophy is possible when we follow in detail the working out of this philosophy in its developed forms.

### **2.3 Major Tenets of Existentialism**

The main philosophical ideal of Existentialism is to emphasize that existence precedes essence. It also stresses that each human being is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise and death predominantly exist. In other words, he is thrown into an absurd world where he cannot find any purpose in his life. Absurd is a term used by modern existential writers to describe what they consider to be the meaninglessness of life in today's world: an absurd world is one which is without absolute values such as virtue and justice, and which confers no dignity on the state of being human.

Existentialism is a philosophy exclusively meant for viewing human beings and their existence in the universe not as a mass but as a collection of individuals. Existentialists like Kierkegaard and Sartre talk about individuals and their subjectivity. Sartre defines subjectivism in two senses: "Subjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity. It is latter which is the deeper meaning of existentialsim".<sup>4</sup>

The existentialist lays emphasis on man's free will in a universe he sees as without meaning or values, but he insists on man's responsibility to make his own meaning and to assert his own values. Even though man is seen as morally

responsible, his position as a moral being is absurd, because his commitment is gratuitous and without any ultimate reward. The existentialist intends to make his own choice because he disbelieves the conventional and the established ways of discerning right from erroneous social, moral, philosophical and religious structures. According to him they are petrified forms which make an extremely complicated real world.

The existentialist concludes that human choice is subjective because individuals finally must make their own choices, without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are free; but because they freely choose, they are completely responsible for their choices. The existentialist emphasizes that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Furthermore, since individuals are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom-and therefore their responsibility - thrust upon them. They are condemned to be free.

For existentialism, responsibility is the dark side of freedom. When individuals realize that they are completely responsible for their decisions, actions, and beliefs they are overcome by anxiety. They try to escape from this anxiety by ignoring or denying their freedom and their responsibility. But because this amounts to ignoring or denying their actual situation, they succeed only in deceiving themselves. The existentialist criticizes this flight from freedom and responsibility into self-deception. He insists that individuals must accept full

responsibility for their behavior, no matter how difficult. If an individual is to live meaningfully and authentically, he or she must become fully aware of the true character of the human situation and bravely accept it.

There is another group of existential themes that includes topics such as finitude, guilt, sin, alienation, despair and death. Kierkegaard always writes about anxiety, guilty, despair and sin. Sin, according to him, can be defined as despair at not willing to be oneself or at willing to be oneself before God. When one is not able to perform an act according to one's will one falls in despair. According to Heidegger, man in despair considers himself to be a victim of external conditions, but when he comes to understand that the trouble is within, he intensifies his predicaments. He finds that he is standing on the ground of nothingness and suffers from the dread of death, a version of insecure feeling. Dread is a type of fear mixed up with indefiniteness. The realization of the contingency of one's own indefinite situation in the world creates anguish. Sartre also considers anguish to be the outcome of man's uncertainty. Anguish of death and the notion of nothingness suggest his loneliness.

Alienation is one of the most essential and a horrifying experience of individuals. It is also the state of liberation from all forces other than the choosing of self: it is the servitude forced on the individual who is conscious that he is rejecting a concept that must exist. Alienation is the greatest sickness of mankind. When one alienates himself from the worldly life or falls in adverse world

situation he becomes anxious. This mood is characterized as anxiety. For existentialists, anxiety, despair, and dread have their source from one's awareness of their deprivation from the worldly affair.

Existential anxiety pervades our whole being, waiting for an unguarded moment to possess us entirely. Angst or anguish is one of the essential themes of existentialism. It can be defined as a kind of generalized uneasiness or anxiety -- a fear or dread that is not channeled through any specific object. We prefer even a terrifying fear of something we understand to this uncaused, inexplicable, free-floating angst. It is the underlying, all pervasive universal conditions of human existence. Angst is also the dread of the nothingness of human existence. Discovering nothing to be afraid of does not remove anxiety; it merely shows our fears were groundless, which may increase our anxiety. For existentialists these existential feelings originate from the consciousness of one's isolation and estrangement thus acting in one way as the revelatory of the human condition.

## **2.4 Major Existential Thinkers**

Existentialism, the philosophy of existence that has recently cast its impact upon the cultural activity, literature, political thought and religious minds in different parts of the globe has been comprehended and interpreted in several senses by both the proponents and opponents. Opponents of this trend give a negative picture describing it as obscure and meaningless. But a note of optimism

is to be traced on the closer analysis of this trend and the stages of its development.

Kierkegaard, who is considered to be the father of existentialism, gives importance to individualism. Kierkegaard says, the full account of the individual existence is obtained in his practical life. Life expresses the totality of experience and such an experience expresses itself in action. He believes that the life of action expresses the true nature of human existence. In the philosophy of Kierkegaard the existence of the individual is associated with subjectivity. He advises that man should ignore objectivity and probe inward to know about himself, that is, subjectivity truth. To Kierkegaard subjectivity is to speak the truth. Truth depends for its validity upon man. Truth comes from within, not from without. Man's decision creates out of itself what is existentially true. Kierkegaard associates truth with God. In his work Fear and Trembling, Sickness Unto Death and other works Kierkegaard asserts that in God alone man may succeed in freeing himself from stress, tension, anxiety and discontent and may find peace of mind and spiritual serenity. Next to him, existentialism was much explored by the German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers.

Martin Heidegger is one of the most influential existential writers. His idea that existence precedes essence is the basic concept of existentialism. Heidegger prefers to be identified as a philosopher of being and not as one concerned with existence. His main interest is to investigate for being [sein] especially man's

being [dasein] : "The being that exists is man. Man alone exists...The proposition "man exists" means; man is that being whose being is distinguished by the open standing -- standing in the unconcealedness of Being, in Being" <sup>5</sup>

Being is experienced in the case of the self alone and is called existence. In other words in experiencing oneself one experiences existence it self. His major work is Being and Time. He says that one can comprehend the meaning of being by differentiating it with non-being. Death is the ultimate of non- being, Death that serves as a limit, calls for authenticity way of being. Discussing the concept of authenticity in human existence, Stephen Neil says, "The reality of existence is to be found only in choice, in decision in the deliberate acceptance of the authentic and rejection of the inauthentic existence."<sup>6</sup> Another critic, Mary Warnock comments :

Authentic existence can begin only when we have realized and thoroughly understood what we are. Once we have grasped that human reality is characterized by the fact that each human being is uniquely himself and no one else, and that each of us has his own possibilities to fulfill. <sup>7</sup>

Heidegger is not concerned with one individual alone as some of the existentialists reiterate. In all his theories he links individuality with generality and describes human existence in general. Having a wider out look on humanity he says that man would be a mere abstraction if he has no contacts with fellow beings. At the

same time he insists that the individual has to separate himself from the life of community and the world and he has to take over the responsibility of all his actions alone by separating himself completely from every day activity.

In his philosophy of existentialism, the existence of individual is more associated with despair or anxiety. It is anxiety that enables an individual to realise his own possibilities and potentialities. Anguish is another theme that he finds to run through human life. He does not relate anguish to death but the death of anguish is the end, that is, nothing. An individual who experiences anguish is in a state of nothingness. This term 'nothingness' helps one understand Heidegger's concept of human existence that it is without any hope and confidence; a human being is thrown into the world; he is condemned to be free -- free to make a choice to understand his freedom and the futility of his existence.

Karl Jaspers talks about three kinds of existence related to being; being - oneself, being - there, and being-in -itself. For him a human being's freedom of being is existence and not man's being in the world. In every day life, man is bound by the objects of the world. If he has to be free from the bindings he has to realize fully his being-oneself. That is, his action has to be determined by himself transcending the material world and his own self. In this way one obtains a knowledge of his existence. Jasper, who is scientific in his approach, asserts that if a human being recognizes the boundary he has enormous possibilities to prove his credit and guilt of his actions: "By consciously recognizing his limit, he sets

himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence." <sup>8</sup>

Jean - Paul Sartre and Albert Camus are the two major proponents of French existentialism. The impact of Heidegger is very much felt upon Sartre's philosophy of existentialism. Both point out that existence precedes essence. Heidegger means by that "Man does not create being, but rather receives his existence from being, and becomes responsible for being and to being. Before he speaks he must let himself be addressed by being."<sup>9</sup>In his major work Being and Nothingness Sartre examines the nature of human existence and distinguishes between two types of being: being-in-itself ("en-soi") and being-for-itself ("pour-soi"). Being -in-itself is the being of an object having no reference beyond itself. It can never be anything other than what it is. It is the object of consciousness and has no trace of negation. Sartre says: "The in-itself has nothing secret; it is solid...it can encompass no negations. It is full positivity. It knows no otherness; it never posits itself as other-than-another-being. It can support no connection with the other. It is itself indefinitely and it exhausts itself in being."<sup>10</sup> While being-for-itself asserts that man is not what it is not and is not what it is:

Soldier or grocer or tailor or professor is the person who I have to be and who I am not.... It is a 'representation' for others and for myself which means that I can be he only in representation. But if I represent myself as him, I am not he; I am separated from him as the

object from subject, separated by nothing, but this nothing isolates me from him. I cannot be he, I can only play at being him; that is imagine to myself that I am he. And thereby affect him with nothingness.<sup>11</sup>

Nothingness comes into the world with man and man's tendency to question his existence is to negate. Sartre puts it: "The being by which Nothingness arrives in the world is a Being such that in its being the Nothingness of its being is in question. The being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness."<sup>12</sup> Nothingness constitutes the distances which divide him from the world and it lies twisted and warped in the heart of being like a disgusting creature. Man tries hard to extricate himself from this emptiness within him by his own thoughts, action and perception. The course of action he adopts enables him to understand the world and also to act in it. By this principle Sartre implies that:

Man first of all exists, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards. A man as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because he is nothing. He will not be anything until later and then he will be what he makes himself. Man is not what he conceives to be, but he is what he wills and makes of himself.<sup>13</sup>

Sartre affirms that the existence of human being is only a conditional one that makes him go desperate. Yet he finds that even in this hopeless world he can

make his own essence. His destiny is based upon his action and he is entirely responsible for what he is. He uses his freedom to create and to be committed.

Sartre's idea of freedom is an exciting one. His terrific desire to conceptualize his notion about the mystery of life is evident in his firm approach to the important existentialist qualities of authenticity and freedom. In Being and Nothingness, for example, Sartre defines human freedom as the one that "precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of human being is suspended in his freedom ...."<sup>14</sup>

Sartre's notion of authenticity is characterized chiefly by the individual's defiant assertion of unqualified freedom in the face of an essentially absurd reality. Since unqualified freedom entails unqualified responsibility, authenticity means that being is totally responsible for one's life. The individual is free to make his own choices of freedom but his freedom is restricted in many ways. Death is one restricting factor of human freedom.

According to Sartre, man is born in a hollowness and leads a passive existence. But when he becomes conscious of his state he comes out of it by his act of will. He also exerts his anguish, and revolts against it to make his existence meaningful in the meaningless absurd world. Erich Fromm analyses these concepts in the context of man's psychic needs:

Man's existential conflict produces certain psychic needs  
common to all men. He is forced to overcome the horror of

separateness, of powerlessness and of lostness and find new forms of relating himself to the world to enable him to feel at home. I have called these psychic needs of existential because they are rooted in the very conditions of human existence. They are shared by all men and their fulfillment is as necessary for man's remaining sane as the fulfillment of organic drive is necessary for his remaining alive.<sup>15</sup>

Just as Heidegger examines the existential conditions of individuals in general and totality Sartre also cherishes a vision of a humanist to perceive existentialism. He regards existentialism as a form of humanism because it supports the view, "here is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity",<sup>16</sup> it reminds "man that there is no legislator but himself and that is not by turning back upon himself, but always beyond himself.... that man can realize himself as truly human."<sup>17</sup>

Sartre through his novels and dramas has been largely responsible for the spread of existential ideas among the people with literary and aesthetic senses. Art being the most powerful expression of human creativity, is of special interest to Sartre. In Sartre's view, art is aimed at creating nothingness, that is, bringing into existence what does not exist. In his analysis of various works of art in the form of poetry, painting, drama, fiction etc., Sartre maintains that it is the creation of unreality, that is, what is not is inspiring the readers. This is the ultimate meaning of creativity. His main concern has been the very spirit of art and not those

extrinsic elements that change artistic form into a product of human creativity. For him the external world acquires meaning only in terms of human consciousness that projects itself towards it. Consciousness is something that is pure and negates what is given.

Sartre has distinguished three types of consciousness; perceptual, conceptual and imaginative. Among the three types, imaginative consciousness is creative consciousness. In his view, art is an activity that creates through images, an illusion. The illusionary or the unrealistic character of a work of art is the source for aesthetic enjoyment. Sartre's proves that art creates an unreality by choosing a character called Jean Genet. In his biography of Jean Genet, Saint. Genet, he depicts the wickedness, treachery and absurdity of the world that transform a genius and a saint into a criminal. Genet has to create himself anew and to transcend the man that is made a thief by the world. What is unreal and evil in Janet is his escape from his own self, resulting in his day-to-day-being. What is real and good in him is his act of freely choosing and creating himself. Jean Genet is not a saint in any sense of the word, but the saint created by Sartre is actually the result of an exercise in creating illusion. Sartre's account of his life as Saint. Genet, is an unreality, but more real than the real one. Though this work of art is not a fiction, yet Sartre created such an image of the real man with unprecedented and insight into human existence and psyche that the real Genet receded into the background and the stage of action was occupied by this image which is the being- for-itself that transcends what he actually

is. This work of art is a good example to show how the basic principles of Sartre's theory can be applied to the creative personality of a writer and his works.

Sartre's view of art and literature is the result of an age which was dominated by political upheavals and ideological conflicts. What makes his theory of art universal even in these conditions is his emphasis on human freedom, creativity and authenticity. Art is the most authentic expression of man's commitment to freedom.

Albert Camus another major promoter of existentialism maintains an atheistic and humanistic stand point like Sartre. He believes in man's ability to fulfill himself and finds his source of values in human experience. Since much of Camus' thought what we call as absurd is similar in temperament with the philosophy of existentialism, and that they are against the forces and organizations which the existentialists normally oppose, he is also called an existentialist.

Camus is not only a profound thinker and a philosopher, he is also an artist who has expressed his dynamics of creativity in the fields of novel and drama focusing his attention more on the psyche of his characters. His work of art as viewed by Leo Pollman from a psychological perspective, is "a journey in the human sense of the word, a journey on which we encounter both the one and the other, light and shade, death and life, sense and absurdity, in the kaleidoscopic shifts of what world and himself mean and can mean to man." <sup>18</sup>

Camus chief aspiration as an existential writer is to search for the meaning of life in the meaning of being, the meaning of existence. Instead of advocating philosophical characterizations for being and human existence he determines to create literature conscientiously through which he communicates his meaning of absurdity.

The word 'absurd' appears in his The Myth of Sisyphus to denote the purposelessness and vanity of human beings' constant search for meaning and loss of meaning in a fragmented world. Absurd novels portray a deceptive world where things have lost their meaning and purpose. Sartre and Camus make use of the image of 'outsider' in delineating the absurd hero who is in self-exile from the surrounding senselessness. The sense of absurdity is there whenever man ceases to think and believe in super natural agent controlling human fate. Even in an age of universal faith, man has given expressions to such feelings. Faith has always been a species of absurdity.

Camus opines that suicide cannot be the solution for man's suffering and it is action alone that helps one to survive in an absurd world. To commit suicide is to surrender to the absurd. A philosophy that deals with life and existence must make man understand that he owes responsibility for all his actions. The sense of the absurd originates in the mind and grows in one's experience.

It is Camus who clearly marks the limitations of the absurd. Neither faith nor reason is reasonable in an absurd world. He accepts the absurd, "as lucid

reason noting its limits".<sup>19</sup> Camus holds that art, though it reflects the futility of all human endeavours, helps the artists to get outside of themselves and see their condition more clearly and for others to comprehend it. An absurd novelist not only uses reason or logic to delineate the senselessness; he or she employs apposite symbols, imagery and myths. As Arnold P. Hinchcliffe remarks, "the myth is an experience from which Camus developed because of his feeling for men who suffer in the absurd world."<sup>20</sup> Camus refers to the myth of Sisyphus to describe modern man's irrational position. The laborious task of Sisyphus, though futile, keeps him active and that is "the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth."<sup>21</sup> By his acts, Sisyphus does not achieve any absolute value, though his acts produce a sense of justification and revolt against destiny, "the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart- one must imagine Sisyphus happy."<sup>22</sup>

Camus explains his theory of absurd based on four human types: Don Juan, the actor, the conqueror, and the creative artist. Don Juan has a quest only for sensual love and not romantic love. Sensual love is not confined to one or two. It is marked by multiplicity and faithlessness. Don Juan has no faith or hope in future. Present and enjoyment of life in the present give him fulfillment. He represents the cold tragedy of the absurd which finds regrets and consolation equally vain.

Camus' second example of the absurd hero is the actor who gives great importance to his body. An actor identifies himself with the characters he portrays on the stage. He gives up his own personality in order to experience the emotion and the passion of the characters' lives. He stands as a man of contradiction. The contradiction is between the singleness of his body and the multiplicity of the characters he enacts as an actor. An absurd man is like the actor who experiences the contrast between the singleness and the multiplicity. His single mind that is not satisfied with the absurd world learns to adapt itself to the situation through the multiplicity of consciousness.

The third example of the absurd hero is the conqueror. The conqueror is conscious of his solitude and tries to sort out ways to escape from himself. He explores the conditions of the man in the world and learns to live in accordance with the result of his intellectual adventure. He chooses history because it occurs within human experience and it is certain. He never believes in eternity that is abstract and ambivalent. He examines his dilemma carefully and desires to free from it in force and intensity. He uses the ethics of revolt as a means to protest. He knows he is finally condemned to failure and death and so he revolts not to solve his problem but to exhibit his courage and boldness. Like Don Juan he is also a tragic figure but he differs from him in his heightened awareness of human situation.

Camus considers the creator especially the creative writer as the fourth model for his absurd hero. The writer though deals with the absurd, writes out of an innate desire, trying to imagine alternatives to this world of chaos achieving a sort of relief, a relief from the nothingness that threatens to be the essence of life. A novelist's sincere endeavour to portray the life of an absurd will not change his condition but it brings an awareness of man's helplessness and that shall become the cause for reorganizing his condition.

It can be said that an absurdist does not find anything to negate the absurd; he does not despair. Instead he has a comprehension of his situation and it is a sort of catharsis to be found in the mind of the absurd. The catharsis need not persevere to design new values. But it can transport the absurd into a peaceful state with his perception being changed. Sartre and Camus feel that those who perceive absurdity can accomplish anything in life and it is a necessary condition.

## **2.5 Sartre's and Camus' Existential Characters.**

Existentialism has been expressed more tellingly in the 19th and 20th literature, especially, in the plays and novels than in philosophical treatises. Camus and Sartre, the leading exponents belonging to the school of existentialism, are the most illustrious examples of those who carried the existentialist teaching through their creative writings as *La Peste* and *La Nausee* to people who would have never read the philosophy treatises.

All the writings of Sartre and Camus focus on the incomprehensibility of the world or make an attempt to rationalize an irrational, disorderly world and their characters are thrown into this world wherein they are compelled to confront absurd situations leading to disintegration of mind and self. The consciousness of absurdity stir in them a deep sense of anxiety. According to Albert Camus, absurdity emerges from anxiety and this initiates our break with everyday and routine activities. What was once normal is now seen as the very cause of anxiety. The reasonable now seems irrational and the familiar begins to appear strange.

Nausea is a novel written by Sartre. In this novel he conveys his idea that one who is born as a human being must live in a world that shall be hostile and indifferent towards them. In other words an absurd and the universe that he lives in are inseparable and interconnected. A sudden insight of it makes a man to feel that he is trapped under absurdity: "Man becomes absurd when he is caught in the process of experiencing the vision of the worlds absurdity that Sartre calls 'Nausea'."<sup>23</sup>

In his story Nausea, Sartre defines in detail of a man's effort to trace sense and meaningfulness in a sick universe and he further investigates his mental realm to comprehend the psychic disorders engendering due to his frustration and state of anxiety and anguish and the routine and monotonous day today life. Even a trivial work of picking up littered papers cause sickness to him:

Objects should not touch because they are alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts. <sup>24</sup>

Roquentin, Sartre's hero of Nausea is truly an existential character who reflects on the absurdity of existence.

Camus' Mersault in The Stranger is an existential hero. He works as a shipping clerk performing monotonous and mundane tasks, which he does not like. He tries to fill his weekends with activity, but often finds himself walking around his apartment, smoking, and staring out into his neighborhood. When he develops a relationship with Marie, it has no meaning to him. He tells her that he can never love her, for love is too vague of an emotion; he will, however, marry her if she insists. His relationship with Raymond is equally absurd. Even though he knows his neighbor is a violent pimp, he allows himself to become involved in his problems, for he feels it makes no difference. In the end, he winds up killing the brother of Raymond's Arab girlfriend, even though he did not really intend to

murder him. Since he shows no remorse or emotion over the murder of the Arab, the death of his mother, or anything else in life, the jury decides that Mersault is unfit to live and convicts him to death by the guillotine. His absurd existence comes to an absurd end.

Camus projects Sisyphus in his The Myth of Sisyphus, as one performing ceaseless and pointless toil and standing as a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs at home or in offices. The man in the story, Sisyphus, has been condemned by the gods to roll a stone to the top of a mountain every day of his life. Every day he rolls it up the mountain and then the stone rolls back down to the bottom. Sisyphus is fully conscious of what will happen after the rock is rolled to the top, yet he is content with doing so: "Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descend. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory." <sup>25</sup>

The gods have done this to him for punishment, but Sisyphus does not see it as that. Camus writes, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."<sup>26</sup> Sisyphus evolves into an absurd hero, "as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing."<sup>27</sup>

Sisyphus is conscious of his plight, and there in lies the tragedy. For if, during the moments of descent, he has nourished the hope that he would yet succeed, then his labour would lose its torment. But Sisyphus is clearly conscious of the extent of his own misery. It is this clear recognition of his destiny that transforms his torment into his victory. It is indeed a victory for Sisyphus as Camus says:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe hence forth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.<sup>28</sup>

Sisyphus' life and torment are transformed into a victory by concentrating on his freedom, his refusal to hope, and his knowledge of the absurdity of his situation.

A study of the Anjana Appachana's novel shows that the writer is unconsciously taking hold of Sartre's and Camus' philosophy and the message underlining The Myth of Sisyphus, "the workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and his fate is no less absurd ....".<sup>29</sup> and explains some aspects of the way the married women think while doing repeatedly the domestic

chores. Anjana also penetrates into the mind of the protagonist, Padma and discovers that she is the worst sufferer of all the characters that she has portrayed in her novel and we find that all her sufferings are that of the existentialist's.

## **2.6 Anjana Appachana as an Existentialist**

Existentialism has been expressed more tellingly in the 19th and 20th literature, especially, in the plays and novels than in philosophical treatises. Camus and Sartre, the leading exponents belonging to the school of existentialism, are the most illustrious examples of those who carried the existentialist teaching through their creative writings as *La Peste* and *La Nausee* to people who would have never read the philosophy treatises.

Anjana Appachana's work of art comes under the literary contributions that are independent of any direct philosophical influence from the existentialists but carrying the implications of existentialists, especially of Sartre's and Camus'. Like any other existentialist Anjana has given preferences to "the 'recurring themes' of existentialism.... such themes as freedom, decision, and responsibility; and, even more, finitude, alienation, guilt, death; and perhaps not least, that peculiar and indefinable intensity of feeling that is apparent in most of the existentialists from Kierkegaard on."<sup>30</sup> It is in this context Anjana Appachana can be called an existentialist writer and all the women characters in her novel as existential characters

Anjana has achieved a place for herself as an existentialist with her single novel Listening Now along with the other two novelists of Indian English literature – Arun Joshi and Anita Desai. They have already been acclaimed for the treatment of existential themes in their novels. They reveal the confrontation of modern man with his self and the question of his existence. Joshi's recurrent theme is alienation. In his four novels- Foreigner, The strange Case of Mr. Billy Biswas, The Apprentice and The last Labyrinth- Joshi deals with four facets of the theme of alienation, in relation to self, the society around, the society outside and humanity at large. The characters of Joshi are alienated and lonesome, therefore they are existentialists, strangers and outsiders to their own land.

Anita Desai, with her writings, shows a departure from current modes of fiction writing in India and makes an earnest effort to break new grounds -- a shift from the external world to the inner world of an individual. We find Desai's characters are complete opposites like the protagonists of Camus as they live like strangers and not able to communicate. The crisis in her fiction is born out of marital discord.

Like Anita Desai, Anjana Appachana also chooses novel as the best form of expressing her subjective perception and writes about the inner emotional and passionate world of her characters struggling against absurdity of life with utmost sincerity. She seems to agree with John Bayley who says that a fiction dealing

with existential problems is the best genre that can cause great impact upon the readers mind:

....it is the fiction of the human condition, of existential isolation and alienation, of efforts at self definition, and vain Sisyphean struggle, that for good historical reasons has the most direct appeal through out the world today. <sup>31</sup>

Any writer, who handles the theme of modern man's predicament, shall find his/her endeavour a colossal task since modernity involves not only scientific and technical improvements but also moral confusion, psychic tribulations and spiritual trepidations resulting in the evolution of Existentialism. Like Sartre's and Camus' Anjana holds diverse thinking with regard to the world and man's life in it. Her writing exposes human psychology. It substantiates a woman's search for herself and her potentialities to create her own values in the world. It describes women's situations in its totality and cares for basic conditions of their existence. It drives its contents from everyday experiences and concrete facts of their domestic life. It presents, therefore, a picture of life with hope and exultation amidst grim realities of life. It promotes woman's striving for becoming truly human. Its message is rooted in the fact that a woman's possibilities are not into preordained mould but exists first and then she makes herself out of her conditions. She therefore is the maker of herself.

### **2.6.1 Anjana's Existential Characters**

Anjana gives a realistic portrayal of modern Indian women especially middle class women who undergo the pangs of sufferings due to their existential thinking.

Padma, the protagonist is an existential being suffocated due to her single status. She is a typical modern woman always feeling an outsider. Though she is a rebel, unwilling to compromise with the existing norms and codes of life and conscious of her comfortable position as a lecturer, pampered by her sister and her friends, she turns impractical and also is reluctant to adapt to the situation. She begins to live in a fantasy world, a world that constrains her free movement and compelling her to turn nostalgic. She of her own accord sets a trap for herself within her mind, not willing to have any feelings about her choice or of her freedom to live a happy woman with the things she is blessed with.

Every single minute at home, when left to herself, she submerges in an unfathomable ocean of the past memories and recalls her college days and amorous involvements with her lover, Karan, his betrayal and of its terrible consequence that has withered her dreams and hopes, and also shattered the happiness of her parents. She makes persistent thinking of her loneliness, sheds tears and remains silent -- a silence that torments her child, Mallika. As perceived by herself and others, she is indifferent and an introvert. She wants to escape from the harsh realities of life, resorting to suicidal death. She forgets the responsibility of her duties as a mother and inflicts terrible pain on her daughter who, in turn,

fantasizes an illusionary world wherein she has a father with super power and a mother, most caring and loving. Towards the end of the novel we find Padma confident and hopeful of a happy future even without Karan.

The remaining characters, who happen to be Padma's mother, sister and neighbours, are absurd women ensnared in the trap of monotonous domesticity. Among these characters. Padma's mother, Rukmani is very practical in her thinking and behaviour as a wife. She derives great satisfaction playing multiple roles though they are in contrast to her individual self. She is aware of the essentiality in playing her roles as a good wife and a responsible mother. Simultaneously she is also aware of her inner self that is terribly disappointed due to her isolated state in her own family. Though her husband and children have comprehended the necessity of her presence and the renderings of her duties as a wife and a mother, they slight her advice and suggestions, making her to be an alienated self. But she does not rebel against her situations. She accepts her position and willingly derives pleasure in any work that she does. Thus she learns to compromise with her absurdity.

Rukmani is not abnormal and indifferent like her daughter, Padma, who rebels at anything and everything that is related with tradition and culture. She prefers servitude to horrendous agony and submissiveness to freedom. She further learns that silence is the universal remedy for all the existential sufferings women undergo in their married life.

Shanta, Padma's sister, is an individual with a worthless passion. She exerts her insignificant and senseless wrath upon her mother, sister, brother, children and her husband. She is the most disturbed of all the characters. She magnifies any matter, however frivolous and trifling it may be, and thereby she intensifies her existential torments.

Anuradha, Padma's friend, is exposed to an absurd domestic world where elements of absurdity are disguised under the cover of order and reason worn by a society. She attempts to seek peace and happiness amidst unpleasant environment but finds hollowness and futility.

Madhu, another friend of Padma is the most gifted one of all the housewives that Anjana has portrayed. She has a caring husband who constantly motivates her to pursue her education, and overwhelms her with wealth and surprise gifts. Yet she finds her life at home meaningless. She suffers due to a guilty sense that impedes her freedom to live and enjoy. She is basically a fragmented self, shuttling between the past, present and future. Her perception of Padma's single status and solitary life brings about an insecure feeling within her. She turns out to be a shattered person due to her hollow thinking and apprehension about future and widowhood that may fall on her out of the blue.

Apart from scenes, situations and emotional state of characters, her narrative techniques also assume existential dimensions.

### **2.6.2 Anjana's Narrative Techniques**

Modern man, having gained wide knowledge in the world that beholds tremendous changes and technical innovations, has not attained the basic wisdom of self knowledge and contentment and this has led to the emergence of fragmented and alienated individuals. Anjana Appachana, a zealous observer of the modern Indian society, has felt the imperative need to fashion her theme and thoughts; expressions and emotions to arouse interest in her modern readers using new technique in her narrative pattern.

Listening Now, the maiden novel of Anjana Appachana, narrates the story of Padma who undergoes existential sufferings in the world as a single woman in the society. This story becomes the main plot of the novel and as sub plots there are six more stories about six other women living in close association with Padma as kindred and friends. Both the main plot and sub plots are intelligibly inter linked. There is no chronological order or time sequence in the manifestation of Padma's tragic tale but there is some logic sense in it as it gets unfurled by the other women in the novel. As Padma's story, the story of her existential agony and scandalizing secrets, is narrated by ordinary women in an extra ordinary manner we also learn about their lives that are not less sensational and amusing than the protagonists'. In the words of Anjana their stories, "encompasses as much love and passion with all its accompanying turbulence, as the unfolding love story."<sup>32</sup>Both the main plot and sub-plots involve a central conflict that leads to individuals struggle developed into existential sufferings.

Structure is responsible for developing a pattern of the novel in terms of unity and coherence, plot, story and time factor. Divided into seven sections, each section narrated by her women characters builds the stories of both the protagonist's and the others. The first section consists of two stories narrated in first person: the first one can be very well considered the prologue and the second one the epilogue. While the other sections are the nostalgic reverberations and modern perceptions of prevailing conditions narrated in third person narratives. Mallika, the daughter of Padma begins her mother's and her friends' existential stories conceived at two stages: childhood and adulthood. The first one which begins half way through the estranged life of Padma, though narrated in the voice of a child, is the exact portrayal of her mother's agony springing from her absurd state baffling her young mind, disappointing her craving heart, infuriating her deceived soul and enabling her to concoct a fantasy world; the second one narrated by Mallika, the married woman, is a full-fledged one in its conjectural delineation of her mother's secret story and her friends' narrated in a compromising and accepting tone: "Women now, we understand our mothers."<sup>33</sup>

The second section of the novel is the expressions of Madhu's flamboyant and frustrated experiences as fragmented self. The third is about Anuradha's existential predicaments arising due to her awareness of being entangled in the absurd domestic world. The fourth one deals with Padma's sister, Shanta who lets her anguish and anxiety rot her mind and her domestic life. Padma's story that

follows Shanta's is the nucleus of the basic theme that unravels the painful agony of Padma and her daughter. The story of Padma's mother, Rukmani, tells us how she unwillingly becomes the cause for Padma's existential trauma. The last section titled "Mallika and Padma, After" confines to particular time while the rest do not. The existential sufferings of Padma and the psychological problems of Mallika, experienced for thirteen years, come to an end after Karan's arrival.

Anjana is more concerned with women's psyche and its mechanism than with the situations. The events that she narrates suits the existential themes that she handles. The course of actions and dialectical exercise navigated by the working of women's mind illustrate her imagination's desire to arrive at a unity of theme -- theme of existentialism.

The use of flash back technique and other literary devices, Stream of Consciousness and Monologue Interior that she employs to trace the inner landscape of her women characters shift the narrative perspective from present to past and again from past to present. The fusion of such past and present in a jigsaw puzzle fashion maintains the existential temper of the novel and of the characters reflecting the author's attitude towards the functioning of the women's psyche in the current of changing impressions and perceptions of the universe. She uses subjective impressions received by various individuals to describe both the external happenings and the internal process of thinking, remembering, brooding etc.

Anjana adds an element of suspense to create a feeling of anxiousness, uncertainty and a tragic sense about the outcome of events connected with Padma's tale. And she gives an unexpected and a surprising ending to the story of longing, desire and passion by making the protagonist to compromise with her single status and continue living in complacency.

In the novel Listening Now, a reader shall find one author and six narrators. The author writes for the readers while the narrators not only addresses the readers but also the person or persons with in the novel. There are two types of narration generally used by the fiction writers and Anjana Appachana employs both the forms. The first two stories narrated by Mallika is in first person and the rest of the stories are in third person. Anjana has unintentionally made use of the first person narrative. In the words of Miriam Allot, " First person narration gives perspective, variety and authenticity to the narrative."<sup>34</sup>It is very much true in the first two stories of Mallika. In the remaining stories Anjana uses third person narration to trace the psychic developments of the characters. She succeeds in stimulating the interest of the readers evoking a strong feeling of closeness with them.

Anjana Appachana in the modern age stands face to face with a flat and inexplicable world. Her keen insight of it strengthens her sensibilities to make exciting fancy flights into the territory of fantasy and lead to the employment of fantasy, dreams, reveries, nightmares, and illusions that can be taken as a kind of manifest of the characters rebellion against the world that appears to be malevolent

and absurd, to construct worlds and visions in which they discover comfort and solace as Shakespeare's character Prospero does in The Tempest. She uses stream of consciousness, Interior monologues and flash-back techniques in her novels that record the internal, emotional experience of the characters on any one level or on combinations of several levels of consciousness.

The inward journey of Anjana Appachana captures the inner qualities of women's absurd life, and their existential thinking with the help of the direct and indirect interior monologues. Invariably all the characters make soliloquies that express their dislocation of normal life, recklessness of their behaviour and morbidity of temperament, maladjustments in the family life of contradictions.

Rukmani's character as a passive and an isolated woman is built upon her nostalgic thinking that reveal her awareness of her problems interlinked with her family . She fears she shall be deprived of the respect she has been receiving from her husband for her silence:

In her own case what would have breaking her silence been worth? Would anything have changed? Nothing. And she would have lost that thing most precious to her – her dignity. She would have lost that most precious thing that He had given her – his reverence.(340)

The observations of the sufferings of her children make her conscious of her inability to intervene and offer them solutions. She knows her children , who

believe in reason, shall never trust instincts that she has been emphasizing upon for uncomplicated life. They see or perceive their mother only in the way they want and not the way she desires. She cannot talk to them openly of her feelings, sufferings that her experiences have given her. She talks to her self and also imagines talking to her grandchild:

She would tell her, each of us think differently, each of us experiences differently. Each making of it what she knew, what she could comprehend. Like these chappatis that you all make, all those acts of kneading, making into balls, rolling, putting on the fire – it seems the same, but each woman brings into something different. Have you noticed, she would tell Mallika, how every little act of making it so different for every woman – the sifting, the pouring of water, the way the knuckles knead, the thoughts that a woman thinks as she does it, which have nothing to do with what she she is making? Have you realized, she would tell Mallika, that it is only in the act of cooking that we can think or talk to one another? Do you know, she would tell Mallika...(402)

Shanta's monologue with the god shows how she is horrified by the emptiness of her married life:

So casually he says it, Krishna, so casually, Oh, you must stay for dinner. Then who has to send the servant for vegetables and who

begins to chop and grind , who has to wash and clean the china and wipe them while Narayana and our friends have intellectuals conversations about politics and history? I tell you, Krishna, my brain has been chopped and ground and cooked, there is nothing left of it, he's right, absolutely right, I have nothing up there, nothing.

(173)

The infinite love that Shanta flaunts for Padma's daughter through the interior monologue brings forth the inner feelings of both Shanta's and Padma's:

Mallika, my love, you might have been born of your mother's womb, but as you grew inside her it was my voice you heard, my food you ate. Amma used to say, a woman who is carrying a child should have good, pure thoughts, she should avoid things which make her angry or unhappy, it will affect the child. Amma said, The foetus hears everything outside, voices, music, everything. But your poor mother couldn't help thinking her thoughts any more than you could help growing inside her. Like a prisoner in a dark cell she was with her thoughts, and you , a tumor growing inside her. As you lay inside your mother's womb, it was your Shantamama's endearments you heard, not your mother's,... Isn't it natural that I know, that I understand all your secret thoughts and dreams? Oh may your secrets never reveal themselves to you. (166)

Shanta has a meaningless claim and possessiveness over her sister's daughter. She derives a sense of fulfillment loving her. She believes that she has every right to be accepted as the real mother by Mallika. Padma, the true biological mother, has been only lamenting over her own pathetic state unwilling to contemplate about her motherhood.

Anjana Appachana employs the device of **stream of consciousness** to develop the action and the plot of the novel through uninterrupted flow of the principle character's thoughts, impressions, imaginations and emotions without regard to logical argument or narrative sequence. Following is the evidence to show how the forces, external and internal, influence the psychology of the protagonist, Padma at a single moment and lead to the development of her story. Padma becomes emotional and has a passionate out burst when she confronts her daughter's demands or goes overwhelmed with her love. Though aware of her own incompetence to be a true mother, she never takes effort to amend the deficiency. She withdraws from herself and her child to reminiscing the past:

"She had allowed her three year- old child to hear her frenzied cry."

Not once, but night after night, she and Mallika weeping in loud unison, Amma Amma, Ma, Ma. Not wanting Mallika, without whom she couldn't live; not wanting Mallika's demands, without which she couldn't have survived; not wanting Mallika's love, with out which she would have curled up and died. I can't live without you, Mallika.

I can't live without you. He had said it to her just once, but she had thought she heard it the other times when he had murmured it against her bare arm, thinking she slept. Sometimes she had wondered if she had dreamt it, Padma...without you...can't live, perhaps she had dreamt it all of it. (225)

Padma's internal landscape permeated with the existential agony is summed up here.

Anjana, who focuses on the projection of human consciousness finds that the working of it in the present can be understood better if the readers are taken to the characters' immediate or distant past. She puts together the distance and the nearness using flashback and nostalgia as narrative techniques to depict scenes or incidents consistently to modify the characters' point of view and then she works through her characters' interaction, their dialogues and reminiscence. Each character has different sort of experiences which reflect their stance towards life, human situation and people they come into contact with.

The author grants access to her readers to have closer view of the protagonist, Padma's memories spinning around past and present and facilitate them to get the impressions of her four different personalities. Padma goes down her memory lane and projects herself first as a young girl, petted and pampered by her parents, brother and sister. She gets engrossed in thinking about her home that she has lost it forever. In such efforts, she underlines the irony of her present

condition as a lonely woman uncared and disowned by her parents all for the fault of being reckless:

“ So easily our Padma has grown up, as if on her own,” Padma had once heard Amma telling Appa. She knew what Amma meant, for neither she nor Appa had had to instruct her advise her or advise her or reprimand her. She could hardly recall any arguments she had had with them – quite, in fact, the opposite of Shanta and Madhav, who were always at odds with one or the other of the Parents: Shanta with Amma, Madhav with Appa. “ Padma is a good child,’ Appa had replied with indulgence, there is no need to tell her anything , she knows right from wrong, weak from strong.” Such an easy child,” Amma had said musingly. But Amma was wrong. She had not grown up on her own. Shantacca had nurtured her, ...(232-233)

As a college student she fails to adapt herself to society. She is obstinate and persistent in having premarital sex with her lover. Her desire to love and live with Karan reveals her personality as a rebel:

She could not stop going to him. Whether people found out or not, whether Karan worried about it or not, she wouldn't stop going to his house. It was only in this house, his house, their house, that he knew how to love her. It was only in these rooms that he instinctively responded to what she wanted, even when she wasn't

sure what it was that she wanted...And for that she would break all the rules in her hostel, for that she would not let him go, ever.(314)

She becomes a mother to an illegitimate child and meets the harsh realities of life.

Yet she is unwilling to forget Karan or his memories:

“ Close your eyes Padma, turn your face. Feel; his mouth across your stomach. No wait. The time which followed that first day in his house – that first. Those two years together. Like her two dreams. The same sense, in the beginning, of anticipation, of promise, of pleasure and joy. She would start from the beginning, knowing the happiness that was to come in the living of it again.” (310)

She turns out to be an incomplete and an inefficient mother affecting the psyche of her daughter, Mallika. Mallika is awestricken and feels flabbergasted seeing her mother getting dissolved and disintegrated into a meaningless shadow of darkness and silence:

It is a terrible thing to know one's mother the way I knew mine. It was a terrible thing to know the unspeakable nature of ma's mourning, which denied me all knowledge of my dead father. I knew how, at nights, she wept for him, silently, bitterly. The night harboured secrets like fire flies. Secrets withheld during the day poured out at night into the darkness of Ma's room, creeping out like smoke from under her door. In the night I heard her beloved, clear

voice turning viscous and unfamiliar, as she twisted in the embrace of a familiar, dreaded nightmare.....(13)

Padma feels the heaviness of mind and the enormity of problems, while working as an English lecturer concealing her true identity as an unwedded mother, in the garb of widowhood to her friends and a married woman to her colleagues:

What bearing did this life have on the one she had in college? Conversations about books and politics? Had she ever had them? Now she didn't care what was happening in the world. Before Shantacca left Delhi after settling Padma in, she had sat with her and given her a long lecture. "Wear your mangalsutra all the time," she told Padma, let people at your work place think you are married. If they find out you are a widow, tell them your husband would never want you to remove it. Don't talk to any man more than necessary. For God's sake remember you can't treat every man you meet the way you treated Madhav and his friends. Men will misunderstand. Only a brother is a brother. Don't open the door for any neighbour if it is a man. Don't talk to them unless they talk to you, and if they do, say only the bare minimum...(248)

The range of personalities of Padma that are integrated with the past and present are represented in simultaneous manner upon a single plane of time.

Madhu feels the shockwave whenever she is shoved into the past. Nostalgia implies for her guilt and sufferings. It is also a media for the revelation of truth about her "flaws in her character" ( 82.)

She had closed her mind to That Life till Padma had opened it again. Not intentionally, she knew Padma didn't do these things intentionally, but Padma loved to listen and so Madhu talked. Then when she went back home the thoughts would whirl round and round and she would find herself distracted and ill tempered.... ('81)

Anuradha's penetration into the past reveals her incapacity to adapt to the changes that occur by means of marriage. She becomes tired of her mother-in-law's arrival that results in drastic transformation of her husband's character. She anchors to her nostalgic past to seek some consolation but finds that memories invoke strange thoughts about her marital relationship: "She tried not to think about the early days, it made her feel ashamed, embarrassed, as though she were a voyeur peeping into the lives of two other people...." (112)

The present is disappointing for Shanta as it constantly reminds of her isolated state and she desires to revert back to her past memories, an act that she treats as a ritual - "ritual of reliving"(192) the past without forgetting. Ironically they are ordinary experiences, mere a train of thoughts, incongruous and incomprehensible reflecting her complex mind and insensitive attitude:

There were some experiences so deeply etched in her consciousness that she could remember them like a film in slow motion. The moments could not be categorized as simply happy or unhappy, they were - in a way- outside the bounds of understanding, beyond words or thoughts. Perhaps that was why she relived them, because even now all she could say to herself was, It was a strange feeling, such a strange feeling . She relived the time she had gone into labour with Vikram, the long, excruciating hours, then the baby. There had been neither joy nor relief as she held him in her arms, this wrinkled, red new being that she had pushed out of her body. What did she feel for him? Not love, how could she love someone she didn't know....

(171)

Rukmani's remembrance of the past as a wife and a mother connotes not only alienation, passivity and silence but also guilt, regrets, anger and frustration. Rukmani's recalls to her memory of her nonparticipation in nurturing and sustaining her children's knowledge. When she witnesses the cold war going on between her children, she comprehends that her family has become a dysfunctional one due to her husband's wrong approach and attitude towards life. She blames her husband's bad influence upon her children. She says that "Once, long ago, He had seduced his children with the books"(352) He believed books and knowledge would make his children competent enough to face the challenges

ahead of them in the society. But neither he nor his children could ever make their lives fruitful with the “lofty ideals” (344) they received from what they read:

“What did you think when you were young? That’s what came of reading novels- you asked stupid questions. All of them- He Shanta. Madhav, Padma.... Luxuriously speculating about people, about situations, about relationships. For what? Useless, utterly useless....” (344)

Rukmani’s retrospection enunciates her frustration and her disappointment.

Rukmani has the sense of guilt as a paramount nostalgic feeling. Her hasty decision with regard to Karan's accident and her determination to have it as a secret and never disclose the news to Padma becomes the central cause for Padma's suffering to persist: "All the years she had borne it. Borne the fact that she had betrayed Padma. Borne the fact that Padma did not forgive her. Borne the fact that Padma felt her mother's betrayal more deeply than she felt her father's...." (393)

Mallika's memories of the past is the beginning of the novel and the core of the theme: "Once, long ago, my mother had enveloped those she loved with radiance and with joy. But I, so consumed by her love, knew neither its radiance nor its joy. My, mother kept her story from me. And in doing so, she also kept mine.... (3)

Memories also help to unfurl the worlds of fantasy and dreams where in the characters take refuge, find solace, accomplish their wishful desires and seek an escape route through it. Sometimes, both the illusionary elements fantasy and dream serve as agents of fear, hopelessness and insecurity. The word fantasy is both a literary and a psychological term. As a literary term fantasy means any narrative that deals with the impossible and preternatural. Anjana makes fantasy a literary tool to probe into the psyche of women. Anjana's women, find their memories of the past, present and future signify sufferings. Self- realization or the awareness of their existential conditions do not liberate them from sorrows. They take temporary shelter from the agony that emanates from their existentialistic conditions by deliberately and consciously weaving fantasy worlds.

Padma's nostalgia results in the fantasizing of a perfect home where Karan is present and lends hand and moral support at her needy hours as a good husband and a father to her child:

Back to her child, back to the house, back to him who had inhabited the house from the beginning. It had begun the day Mallika was born, his face bent over his daughter, suffused with tenderness. With her in Delhi, in bed next to her talking. Holding his daughter, rocking her to sleep, his long body swaying to a murmured song. In the house when Mallika took her first steps, standing on the other side, bending down, arms stretched out. Next to Mallika when

she was sick, mopping her brow, feeding her soup, his familiar worried frown creasing his forehead. Smiling at her report card,....(242)

But Padma never stops with the imagination of a happy home. She crawls into a dark world where she stretches her time and thoughts toward her student's life. Her imagination unfolds an apprehensive situation reflecting her anguish and alienation from the world.

To the rest of the characters, fantasy is a utopia where in they have their wish fulfillment. Anuradha's rapport with her husband is marked only by her loneliness and uncommunicative behaviour. She frantically tries to search for a real meaning in life but she is utterly frustrated. Nothing sustains in her life. Her longings are fulfilled only in her fantasy. She fantasizes an imaginary conversation with her husband and partakes in it, asserting her righteousness and makes him comprehend her biggest problems:

She talked to him as she worked in the kitchen and in these talks there was satisfaction because he lost his habitual calm. True, there were times when he had lost his habitual calm in real life, but this was because he was incredulous, whereas in her imagination, it was because he believed her. But in the real world that she inhabited she would find herself exclaiming in frustration, " You just don't

understand me.” Once he asked, patient as ever, “Do you understand yourself?” (113)

Shanta has grown tired of the dull life. She feels no genuine happiness in her marital context. Her hopelessness rises and makes her insensitive, cruel and alien to her husband and her children. Her insanity and paramount rage drive her to fantasize about death and “walk out of the house leaving everything behind her including her children”(168)

She fantasized about dying or being close to death. Sometimes the former seemed preferable, they would know her worth then, all of them, its finality would bring about the realizations long overdue, they would grieve bitterly. But then what of Vikram and Varun and Mallika, how would they survive her death? How would Padma? She wept at the thought,....But after that ? would a mighty change be wrought,.... Naturally not; once she recovered, life would go on, unchanged. That was the problem with this fantasy of Almost Dying But not Quite. ( 167)

Fantasy does not give Shanta a solace. Imagining her own death and the helpless state of her husband, she moves towards to reach a position of being self-critical. Her self-knowledge and self-understanding reveal her sense of vacuum inside her:

She fantaized about it sometimes, fantasized about Narayana looking desperately for his socks and vests every morning and coming back

from the office and tutoring the boys and managing the servants and not knowing what rations to order every month. Oh God, Oh God, Shanta would think, almost laughing at the irony of it. So even in her imagination this was all Narayana would miss, the absence of clothes and appropriate food and a well-organized house... this then was the tragedy, her knowledge of what she meant to him now, just a footprint that would in time disappear, nothing deeper, or sharper, or sweeter. (168)

Anjana's protagonist has dreams. She undergoes the pangs of pain due to distorted reality which causes inexorable disappointments, non-belief in conventionality and hopelessness in life. She suffers from fear psychosis. And she begins to dream. While her nostalgia is with the past, fantasy with the present, dreams are related with future. When Freudian interpretation of dreams refers to self-understanding, the existential interpretation indicates, "the person's stable adjustment or orientation to the universe as a whole or to some significant aspect of it."<sup>35</sup>

Padma's awareness of her self with regard to her single position and her relationship causes a fear concerning her daughter's safety. She has two terrible dreams, haunting her every night never letting her to sleep; one is about the kidnapping of Mallika and the other related with her death. Dreams signify her hopelessness and insecure life that she has been facing single-handedly.

Anjana has adopted new expressions, accentuated rhythm, pertinent images, symbols, simile and metaphors carrying existential themes to support her narrative techniques. She describes the inner crisis of the protagonist using concrete symbols and abstract images in the following passage:

In that deep and distant time, there lived in my house my permanently stricken mother, my mother's vivacious, laughing sister, and my absent father, whose presence in our house was shaped by my grieving mother's awful silence. Our house was like a well, holding his absence and her silence, and within those waters, my story began. (3)

Shanta's existential angst, expressed and unexpressed openly, is apparently revealed through relevant simile and metaphor.

But the anger never left her. Like all the other things, it merely got swallowed deep inside; the daily ebb and flow washed to the surface- shell-like --the littler things, which was she could speak of, these little things daily becoming more unmanageable and more unwieldy, and beneath, the heavier things, unuttered, unseen, sunk deep. (202 )

'Curse' that has been much discussed by critics as an insignificant issue, irrelevantly used by the author is disappointing. It is just another form of rage exploding from the anguished heart of Shanta and her mother Rukmani. The

events that take place at Karan's family implying barrenness may be accidental or incidental. But it is a symbol of vengeance and destruction having devastating effect upon the victims of the heart, ravenous and furious. It is also employed by the author as an instrument in evoking guilt within Shanta and making her heart throb. An eerie feeling creeps into the mind of the readers when Shanta remembers the curse cast upon Karan's family:

Then, as though in a dream, Shanta had Amma's voice. Soft it was, almost musical, speaking in Kannada. As though she were chanting her morning prayers -- Shree Rama, Jaya Rama -- the same rhythm those words, the same absorption. As though is in a dream the words twisted and writhed into the room. As though she, Shanta lay insulated in a glass bottle which had been thrown into a pot of snakes, nothing would touch her, but she saw everything, and there was no insulation against that.(194)

Anajan Appachana proves Camus statement : " A novel is never anything but a philosophy translated into images." <sup>36</sup>

The author uses images like "darkness" and "silence" repeatedly. Padma remains in darkness to emphasize her isolation. To Mallika darkness is lack of cheerfulness and happiness. "Silence" stands as an image for Padma's nostalgic penetration into the past while Mallika perceives it as a weapon that torments her

psyche. Almost all the characters use these two terms to define their existential conditions.

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. They undergo psychic traumas that shifts them from normality to abnormality. They develop marital conflicts with their spouse and ruin their human relationship with their kindred. They feel isolated, sense nausea and turn nostalgic. Anjana uses organic and inorganic images to express those feelings, which indicate dejected mind, languishing in self isolation and lamenting over the problems that are feminine. Menstrual periods, abortions, unsatisfactory sexuality and child birth that symbolize women's problems are magnified as treacherous bodily disorders or diseases threatening their existence. . Invariably all married women in the novel blatantly talk about it. Shanta is to suffer the worst.

The death motif is predominant in Anjana's novel. " Death is the most inexorable " given" of the human condition."<sup>37</sup>This is feared and dreaded by Anjana's women. They treat both birth and death as monstrous and dreadful, ready to consume the lives of the near and dear ones. For Padma the growth of a baby is like the growth of a monster, avaricious and predator like to ingest her privacy and freedom. To Madhu, death is a creature with tentacles to strangle her children. To

Shanta birth is like death or an event of rebirth and death is the collapse of the family. Anuradha imagines that death of her babe in the womb is a way of teaching a lesson to her husband who is insensitive to her dire needs and lacking an impulsive response to her sorrows and worries. The characters' perception and apprehension of birth and death suggest their consciousness of emptiness and their incapacity to deal with life's situations through mental effort.

With the incorporation of versatile themes and brilliant narrative techniques Anjana has achieved an ingenious synthesis of her perception, imagination and expression. Her focal interest is to express her conviction that women are responsible for the calamities of their lives and that men or others cannot be entirely blamed .

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## CHAPTER 3

### **The Protagonist and Her Existential Predicaments**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Anajana Appachana is a writer shaping the contours of women's internal landscape. She is concerned exclusively with the personal tragedy of individuals. All her women characters are the victims of their inner search for meaning of life. Padma, the protagonist is the greatest sufferer of all the women characters in the novel. She is tortured by her own meaninglessness and hollow existence. Consciously or sub-consciously she goes deep into her own psyche and exposes her inner-self.

Edmund Fuller rightly points out, "man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problem...a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence."<sup>1</sup> Padma's predicaments that begin with her self-alienation, self-inflicted sorrows and strenuous efforts to cope with the demands of her inner cravings and desire make her to go astray, break from normal life and face the existential crisis. Her crisis is expressed through her emotional turbulence, unceasing tears, perpetual silence, indifferent ideologies, rebellious mind and obsession with death and chaos.

### **3.2 Padma as an Alienated Self**

Anjana Appachana presents Padma as a confused single woman. She is an alienated individual who does not give importance to conventional middle class life. To Anjana, alienation is more related to emotional and mental moods and attitudes of her characters than to their spiritual, moral, ethical or any other

objective temperaments. It is due to the conflict between the need to withdraw and the need to be involved in the painful process of life and that is to be traced in the story of the protagonist.

One finds Padma having no burden or worries till she meets Karan. Her parents' love, brother's care and her sister's moral support gave Padma a comfortable and a cozy life, granting her no chance to know about herself and the society she lived in. The life that was full of unconditional freedom is now conditioned by agony and pain:

If she was to recall her childhood what would she say? She would say, I knew happiness then. I knew the comfort of absolute security. I knew freedom. No, no. That was not the way to say it. No, she would say, I grew up easily, comfortably. I did not know what it was to feel trapped. That was what my childhood was, the absence of such knowledge. Such knowledge I had only from books. I shed tears only for the characters in my books. It was only their pain it was real. Then it happened to me.(234)

Padma's blithe nature involves her in a love affair. She falls in love with her brother's friend Karan. She is so honest in her expression that she does not intend concealing her emotions and passions. She openly shows her delight in having physical contacts with him. Her physical affection signals a deeper and a sentimental one. She hopes that she shall marry Karan and make a family of her

own as an ordinary woman though with indifference, driven by hopes and ambition. She cleaves to a sense that there are things that are worth doing.

Padma's dream shatters when Karan makes her pregnant and marries another woman. She becomes conscious of her loneliness and abandons the idea of there being any meaning or any value to the life that she is going to live without him. The realization gives her terrible pain and sufferings: "It was death without him, her own. The pain, a monster inhabiting her body, imprisoned in her flesh, growing larger than her. Eating her brain, chewing off her tongue, swallowing her eyes, gnawing off her ears." (332) She gives up her lively and joyful behaviour and turns out to be a fragile introvert undertaking self-exploratory journey, which finally culminates in compromise and conformity. She arrives at this solution in stages.

In the first stage, Padma camouflages her identity as an unwed mother, feigning widowhood to her neighbours, and a married woman to the society and her male colleagues. But the exterior conversion does not give her any relief. Instead it augments her existential predicaments that have their impact upon her child, Mallika and the people around her. She becomes conscious of what is happening to her and others, yet she fails to establish a complete communication and interaction with the reality in life: "Nothing simple now. Endless the subterfuges. Dragging Amma into it, Shanta into it, its slimy arms around her

child, her friends, her neighbours. And not just the big lies. The smaller subterfuges which had the potential to become so enormous.”(254)

Padma both physically and psychologically detaches herself from the world around her. She begins to live alone with her child in Delhi, shunning her parents, living on her own, paying her own price and bearing her agonizing difficulties in the world that is unsafe for single women. She isolates herself from all and completely avoids social life and ceases to pay any more attention to “What was happening in the world....”(248) She recognizes her displacement. She is often haunted by the feeling of disorientation. An outsider, she remains untouched by the milieu: “She didn’t want to talk to anyone. She desired nothing except sleep. Everything paled before the enormity of having to survive one day after the other, the days rolling into one another, the weeks, the months the years....”(248). This is an instance of total disorientation and isolation from which Padma suffers. Her feeling of isolation from the milieu is almost Camuseque. One is reminded of Camus, The Outsider. Meursault says: “Mother died today. Or may be yesterday. I don’t know. I had a telegram from the home: ‘Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours sincerely’.That doesn’t mean anything”<sup>2</sup> Such a state also reminds of Sartre’s Ronquentin, who, unable to share the collective joy of the Bouvillois, stands alone: “But, after all it was their Sunday, not mine”<sup>3</sup> Not only that Ronquentin also feels “so far away from them”<sup>4</sup>

In the second stage, she contemplates rebellion. Society is a conscious entity, continuously administering its influence upon the despairing self, which is ensnared in the bewildering texture of the social gossamer and struggles unsuccessfully for an escape. The self struggles and falters, falters and struggles and in the process turns rebel. Padma for the sake of outwitting the adversity that has overtaken her in the form of social codes and domestic obligations, transforms herself as a revolutionary personality with a different thinking and attitude towards life. She does not take a compromising stance and surrender to the family or society bound with rigid norms. Instead, she exercises her free will and chooses a life of her own. At the same time she is aware that she has to restrict her rebellious instincts to satisfy the demands imposed upon single women. This awareness leads to the arousal of distressing conflicts between external and internal responsibilities as a daughter, a lover and an unwed mother accompanied with confounding existential experiences.

When Padma becomes pregnant due to her premarital sexual contact with Karan, she determines to be on her own, allowing none not even her mother to interfere and decide about her life. She ignores her parents' suggestion of aborting the baby, continues with her pregnancy and gives birth to an illegitimate daughter. She hides her true self as an unwed mother and tells her friends that she is a widow. From the time of her husband's death, an Indian widow is forced by customary practice of ritual to do away with the symbols that gave her the status

as married women -- mangal sutra (a sacred thread tied around the bride's neck), toe rings, kum-kum (a red paste on the forehead), flowers adorning the plaits, bangles and colourful garments. Though Padma addresses herself as a widow her way of dressing is not in direct proportion to the widow image that she externalizes. Anuradha's mother-in-law, a gossiping elderly woman, feels scandalized: " 'Widow she might be, but see how much saj-dhaj she does- lipstick, mangal sutra, bindi and see her saree red, yellow, green....' "(76) Padma's close friend, Mathu is flabbergasted "when she sees Padma's passion to hang jasmine flowers at the top of her plait like a Bharatha Natium dancer's...." (88)

Events that would be significant for most women, such as marriage, childbirth, motherhood, women's chastity and morality do not matter to her and she holds different perceptions about them. She legitimizes what others consider as illegitimate and immoral, turns furious over issues concerned with women's liberty and men's sexual abuse, and finds a kind of relief from tension in practicing exceptional manners not ordinarily found among women. She expresses her concern for a servant maid who is sexually abused and made pregnant by Madhu's brothers:

"What do I know. Three months, four months... just left suddenly warning also she didn't give... arre, why are you looking like *that*?"

Padma shook her head as though she couldn't speak. "Too much you are Padma," Madhu said, and now the rage was building up in her. "

like a bitch she behaved, my brothers didn't force her, they are not like that, money also they gave her whenever she wanted. Ha!" she snorted.

"Stop it Madhu.' Her words were almost incoherent. *Stop it.*"

Madhu's body jerked.'

*Think* about what you are saying, just *think* about what you are saying."

"Padma," Madhu whispered, ..."she wasn't like us, she was a servant, those people they can keep doing it."

"She left because she was *pregnant*," Padma panted.

Madhu is utterly taken aback by the unexpected outburst of Padma and struggles to muddle through the uneasy feeling inspite of knowing the cause for her revolting and resentful nature that she associates with her vulnerability:

Padma had turned upon her. She felt as though her world was tearing apart.... The pain was so deep that she could not even cry. The thing was that Padma's own experiences had made vulnerable. She transferred her pain to every other woman. She had done it with Mrs. Moitra. She had done it now with this haraam zaadi woman. Because her husband had died leaving her almost destitute, because her in-laws had nothing to do with her. because her father and brother had abandoned her, she blamed men for everything. (97)

Padma's revolting sense is expressed when she deliberately plunges into a forlorn state: "all lights off, all doors bolted"(231) smoking cigarettes, "savouring every drag, blowing it out of the window, no houses behind this window, no light inside her room, the fan whirring....(231) Her continuous longing to revert back to her memories of the past to escape from the present shows her futile search for happiness and consolation. She continues to suffer from the feeling of suffocation and disassociation of her internal self. This revolting resignation indicates not only her vulnerability but also the futility of protest in an isolated state.

Padma's rebellious instincts engage her mind with contradictory and controversial thoughts. Her fretful but legitimate anger towards Madhu's brothers becomes insignificant and meaningless when she hungrily has sex with Karan whom she meets after thirteen years. Despite the fact that she is angry with him and has no intention to reconstruct a new life as his wife, she allows her animal instinct to come to the fore and has passionate but a loveless sex with him. Karan feels surprised for the second time: " '.... this woman no less savage than this man, no matter , no stopping, no thinking.'" (470). He gets worried of her safety while Padma dismisses the matter as an inconsequential one:

She sat on the sofa and took out her cigarettes. She offered him one. He took it. She lit it, then hers. For a while they both smoked silently.

" If you get pregnant--"

" It's the wrong time."

"But--"

" It's all right. This had to happen."

That's not what I meant."

" I know. It happened once. It could happen again. It's all right. I don't intend having another baby."

" You'd do that?"

"Yes."

She would . He could see it on her face.

" I shouldn't have---"

" I told you. It is all right. I wanted it as much as you did."

' Is that all it meant to you?"

.... ( 471- 472)

A sense of revolt found inside Padma leads her to the third stage where she goes through the traumas and tribulations meant for single women alienated from their selves and from others.

### **3.3 Padma's Psychic Trauma**

Padma staunchly believes that Karan has been the cause of her tragedy and that makes her neurotic. She withdraws into her own private shell and drugs her sensibilities into an illusive calmness which betrays her own sub conscious workings. She continues to travel between the unforgettable past and the

uncertain present. She indulges in processes of thinking that continually fan the flames of her aggravation. The disappointment of having lost Karan takes away her enthusiasm substituting a lethargic sense, and an absurd feeling. It is the worst sorrow in her life and never makes an attempt to rejuvenate her mind and body. She relives her past hoping for comfort and consolation but turns extremely exhaustive and disinterested in life:

In her case exhaustion had killed her desire for books, for music, for walks, for her favourite sweet, even for Karan. Reliving those four and a half years night after night was like reliving a story without the desire, It was comfort that she had sought from those memories, and tenderness, both of which he- after those first two years - had had so much to give.... And when her memory of him returned it was fiercer and more overpowering than it had been whom she knew of him, for there was no assuaging it. (261)

Memories of the past instill only guilty feeling and remorseful thoughts:

She, Padma, had erred, not in what she had seen of herself, which he had seen. She would have waited. He had wanted to. She should have been willing to continue meeting in the evenings, going out occasionally for lunch, for walks, to their bookshops. But no, she was not content with that, she had wanted him completely. And since that could not be done honestly, she had done it dishonestly.

And when he had found out and realized what she had done, she had lost him. No, not merely his realization of what she had done. His realization of what she was.(332)

She earnestly wishes that she "had been less impetuous, less impatient, more willing to listen to Karan, then they would have got married and Mallika would have had a father."(332) She feels awkward and uneasy for her disguise and pretensions as a widow and for her inability to disclose her true story of guilt:

Good, honest, brave Mrs. Rao. Anu and Madhu indulging her, protecting her, mothering her, standing by her. They did not know how unworthy she was of what they gave. And she kept receiving it, kept expecting it, yes, demanding it, and one day they would find out how she had deceived themselves. No, no they would find out how she had deceived them, they would find out what she was. (226)

Padma does not wish to lose her friends at least. Already she has lost all her close relatives and to imagine that she shall also lose her friends, produces a dreadful fear and anxiety. A process of ego dissolution begins. She finds herself merging into others:

If anything happens between my friends and me, it will be the same thing.... She waited every day for Madhu to drop in for her evening gossip, and Madhu did, almost every evening and when she didn't how the old fear would begin muzzling Padma's ankles, the fear that

told her Madhu finally, knew, that now Madhu would never come, that now she had lost her as she had lost Karan and Madhav and Appa and Amma....When she dropped in to Anu's house, and Anu sounded pre occupied she knew the same fear, the fear that told her that gentle and generous Anu also knew, that now, inevitable, she had lost Anu too. ( 229)

The chain of agony that she undergoes in the external world propels her out of rebellion to cowardice. She believes as a single woman she is hardly left with no choice. She is frightened to be all alone without the support of friends. She realizes her life is intensely circumscribed that without them her existence shall be insecure and learns to live with them in a detached manner. But she does not turn being susceptible to suggestions from them or easily led or persuaded by others. She continues to be on her own unwilling to be metamorphosed into a complacent woman with no guilt, cravings, anxiety or fear. Her anxiety intensifies and her hopelessness rises as she becomes conscious of the punishment she may get for the mistakes she has done in the past especially for not wishing to have Mallika:

The worst was the third, the final punishment. And this would be for the nine months that she had not wanted Mallika out, out, away. This wish was waiting to fulfill itself. One day, it would happen. Mallika would die. She would fall ill, shudder, stop breathing, she would be kidnapped, she would fall from the roof and smash her head, she

would go to school and never come back. She would go to play with Mahima and never return, and Madhu would say, But she never came here, Padma, she never came her, Padma would go to Mallika's room in the middle of the night and find her quiet, not breathing, in bed, Padma would go her child's room and Mallika would not be in bed, Mallika would cross the road and be run over, someone would enter the house when Padma was at the college and take Mallika away- in one of these forms or the other it would happen to her child. This then would be her final , absolute punishment. And this of course, there was no surviving. (228)

Her insanity develops in her mind uncertain and unrealistic attitude towards life. It also eliminates her ability to take responsible decisions in which her existence and her daughter's are involved. She is further driven to imagine constantly about her death:

I want to die. I want to die... she had cried it out against her child, against her demands against her love,... not wanting Mallika, without whom she couldn't live; not wanting Mallika's demands, without which she wouldn't have survived; not wanting Mallika's love, without which she would have curled up and died.( 225)

According to Camus a truly and serious philosophical problem is suicide. He suggests if one intends to die it is like acknowledging that their life is not worth living and this is a feeling of absurdity.

### **3.4 Padma and Her Motherhood**

The difficulties of unmarried women's pregnancies have been dealt by Western writers like Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing and Iris Murdoch. We find in Margaret Drabble's The Needle's eye, The Millstone and The Ice Age, all her unmarried heroines, suffering at the hands of the society. They are young and bold. They are educated and discrete enough to judge the right path of action. In spite of all these they are compelled to live in the man's world where their place and respectability are defined by men. Consequently they suffer carrying the stigma as unmarried women with illegitimate children. Padma escapes from such scandals since she conceals her identity as a widow.

Padma bears much resemblance to Rosamund in The Millstone. Both take a bold step to keep the babies they conceive before their marriage and both predict their new babies would risk their independence and would be interfering in their routine. Rosamund in a complaining tone says that motherhood means thinking of "...someone else, twenty four hours of everyday, and not for a year or two, but forever, more or less."<sup>5</sup> As she feels the baby growing within she changes to be a woman who is ready to sacrifice anything to seek the pleasure of motherhood and it is here she is different from Padma. The baby seemed to carry a lot of meaning

in Rosamund's life: "It seemed to have meaning. It seemed to be the kind of event to which, however, accidental its cause, one would not say No."<sup>6</sup> Pregnancy or abortion matter the same for Padma. To have the baby in her womb was like having a monster that continuously gnawed her happiness and this bitter thought led to the development of mental crisis related with birth trauma and maternal care and rearing practices. At the early stage of her pregnancy Padma finds no thrill or excitement. Instead she remains as an isolated being lingering in a state of stupor, insensible to the physical changes happening within her:

As the stomach grew she felt she was somewhere else. She never thought of the baby, there was nothing to think about it. When it began to move inside her, it felt as if some creature had decided to make its home in her body, a creature that did not intend to harm her but merely wanted a comfortable place in which to sleep and grow.

It had nothing to do with her at all or she to do with it. (271)

Adrienne Rich while reinterpreting the ideas of mothering and motherhood asserts that the true experience of motherhood, which is entirely a mother's province, is deemed with pleasure, satisfaction and self-fulfillment and it need not be "a penal servitude."<sup>7</sup> For Padma, motherhood is neither a punishment nor a celebrated norm. It is something that is related with her apprehensions of alienation. She always fears she would be left alone and that her daughter would die in an accident or that she would be abducted.

Never does she let the thought that she is a bad mother to escape from her mind. The awareness that she “has recoiled from female biology”<sup>8</sup> and that she has failed to render her motherly duties after her child's birth increases her anxiety and makes her to doubt her maternal instincts:

Was it only she who felt that there was nothing natural about motherhood? That motherhood meant the virtual end of all desire? No one spoke of such things, not in books, not in articles, nowhere.... She was the anomaly, the unnatural mother. She had always associated motherhood with all that was gentle and tender and soft: a gurgling child, a toothless smile, the mother's smiling face suffused with tenderness. And she had had that too with the child Mallika but when it came, she was too tired to enjoy it. (259)

Most of the time she forgets that her own personality traits dispose her towards existential distress and cause discomforts to others. Padma's indifference to being mere a biological mother to her daughter with no demonstration of motherly love, her preoccupation with her own thoughts and her terrible silence have their impact upon her daughter. Mallika, even at the age of three, grasps “the unspeakable nature of mother's grief.” (226)

I knew my mother's silence, Even at three I knew it worse than her weeping, this silence. No love to be had from her when she was silent, No fierce aftermath. I knew the silence better than any other.

This was the silence better than any other. This was the silence which crippled my mother; this was the silence that held my father; this was the silence which excluded me completely. There was more terror in this than all ma's tears. (8)

### **3.5 Mallika's Predicament**

Padma's sorrow directly and indirectly causes stress to Mallika which is reflected in her perception of her mother being less affectionate and caring. Padma's nurturing practices disappoints her. She feels emotionally deprived of both the father's and mother's love and that leads to mental torture. She feels sorry for herself whenever her mother has her sickness or tiredness as an excuse to escape from rendering her motherly duties. Once, Padma hesitates to feed her:

“ “And don't say I should feed you,” amma said, the circles under her eyes looking darker than ever. “I am tired.” ” (9) Mallika terribly disappointed with her mother's blunt refusal cries and reproaches her in a fit of rage: “... sobs racked my body. I picked up the fruit knife from the table. Don't feed me. Don't feed me. Let me starve and then you can be happy. Then you'll never be tired.” Here, I thrust the knife at my mother, “take it and poke it into my heart and be happy. (9)

Mallika's normal childhood is affected due to her mother's silence that is more tormenting than her tears. She knows that her mother's past love is the source for her mother's traumatic and apathetic behaviour. Padma, who remains single and "permanently grief-stricken". (3) never ensures happiness to her daughter. Her

rejection of the present and nostalgic remembrance of the past prevents her child, Mallika to accept the reality. On the other hand, Mallika finds herself to be in confrontation with the reality and thus pushed into an emptiness which signals that her life is going to be incomplete always; “ And I knew how incomplete my life was, how attenuated, and I feared it would always be.”(41)

Padma’s peevishness ever reminds Mallika of her father's absence and that assaults her. The ringing of the door bell at home is fervently hoped by her to be that of her father's call. Through the process of psychic transitions she creates a fantasy world where she lives with a father who she imagines to be “the arbiter of justice. The protector. The man who will keep her from harm”(397) Once when she is physically abused by men on the street, she at once concocts an adventurous story in which her imaginary father acts heroically and protects her from the men who humiliate her: *"Dada's eyes blazing with anger. Picking up the men by the scruff of their necks, shaking them till they begged for mercy. Contemptuously, throwing them into the ditch. Saying through gritted teeth, next time I won't be merciful."* (47)

Mallika’s imagination takes her nowhere and the sufferings that she experiences as a lonely child prolongs. Her intense longing to see her father is not only to make a complete home but it is also to wipe away the tears of her mother permanently. She understands that it is her mother's grief which is the root cause for all her sufferings: "I cannot bear Ma's suffering, it smothers me. Her grief has

since the beginning, been my own, I wear it in the same manner that she does,...."

(16) She wishes to see her as a normal, and natural being endowed with gifts to transmute her love into a "natural rhythms... longed to see her face frowning with concentration as she briskly stirred the chicken curry, kneaded the dough, checked on the oven where the cake was raising, cleared the dishes around her, wiped the counters, her movements quick and assured."(16). But Padma is so withdrawn and much preoccupied with her own thoughts that she shows no interest either to take care of her home or her daughter: "No desire to clean, swab, dust, arrange, rearrange. Things fell out of her cupboard. Her books lay all over the house." (29) Padma loves her daughter but is unable to express her love the way her sister, Mallika's foster mother, Shanta does:

The love that my Shantamama bore me was like Infinity, she had told me once. This Infinity Love meant I always came first, it was that simple. But there was nothing simple about the way that Ma loved me. Huge, suffocating and passionate, it was still lesser than her other love-the one she never spoke of. (10)

Mallika realizes her life is abnormal and bereft of any lovable and benevolent intimacy with her mother. Padma also senses of the chasm that is existing between them:" 'We're... bad for each other... we don't ...balance one...another.' "(440)"....we cannot enjoy each other the way she and Shantacca can. We don't give each other much...laughter. We have no ... protection from

one another.”(441)This emotional gap fails to bring the mother and daughter very close. Mallika’s detection of her mother's imperfection and nonchalant attitude towards domestic chores and motherly duties show how Padma’s agony is reduced to innate vacuity of her existence:

Ma' passion ran a different course. My mother, so lovely and graceful, so kind and good, tender and true, was strangely inept in the things that mother's do. Her love was bountiful but it did not get translated into mother's natural rhythms....Alas, my mother's love blossomed in unfamiliar ways; the path she tread cut through an unknown territory. (16)

The abounding love of Padma or Shanta does not give a secured feeling that is absolutely necessary for a girl. Her ardent wish is to obtain security and protection from her father. When he comes in person after thirteen years to take her with him, she neither accepts him as her father nor allows her mother to reconcile with him. She, who has been earlier praying to redeem her mother from the state of single parenthood, disregards him in the context of society and its tendency to scandalise her mother's reputation:

“Ma’s got a very good reputation in the colony. And in her college.”

Now what.

“Except Narayan Uncle when he comes home with Shantamama, no man ever comes to our house.”

Ah. That was it.

“ If you keep coming and seeing us the people will start gossiping about Ma.”

She wasn't sure of her mother. For the first time in her life. She wanted him away. Out.(432)

While the truth is that she believes that Karan is entirely responsible for her mother's perpetual sorrows and perennial tears. She, having been given the task of determining her future, resolves to continue their lives as usual with no man to take care of them. Mallika, who is exposed only to her mother's outward and ostentatious exposition of her sufferings, magnifies it and has it as a reason to disown her father. She never understands perfectly the intricate psychic problems related to her mother's loneliness and her longings to be with Karan. Thereby, she indirectly becomes responsible for Padma to reach the final stage of compliance and conformity.

### **3.6 Padma's Ultimate Choice**

Padma, encouraged by Mallika's stance to live without her father, opens the heart and outpours all her feelings and emotions. Though she has given faint hope to Karan of the possibility for reconciliation, now takes firm position and in a resolute tone says that she is not any more the “dream Padma”(509) brooding over

her single status and vacuity existing in her life and that she shall continue to live without Karan:

"This....this compulsion , it doesn't come out of the four years we knew each other, Karan - it comes out of the thirteen years we spent apart...." I've built up another life for myself. I have Mallika. Shantacca, Madhu, Anu. Amma ."....," Now I have to learn to live without Karan." (50)

Padma withdraws from Karan and his memories, recognises the people around her and develops a sense of belonging. Her ultimate decision shows that she is no more a lady with incompetency and incompleteness. She is an able woman like Betty Flanders in Virginia Woolf's novel Jacob's Room. Betty Flanders suggestively represents the loneliness and anxiety of a single parent and the psychic feeling of helplessness which is associated with it. As a sensitive woman she sharply reacts to social restrictions and boldly faces the challenges inflicted upon her and manages to ascertain herself as an independent woman. Padma is deficient of such courage and boldness. Still she depends upon her friends but shows symptoms that she is emerging as a strong woman who can accept the challenges with the expansion of experience. Her mind is now free from confounded thoughts. There is a promise of a real awakening in Padma and no chance of returning to repose.

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The International Landscape and the Existential Agony of Women in Anjana Appachana's Novel

*Listening Now*- A Doctoral Dissertation

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## CHAPTER 4

## The Existential Agony of Wives and Mothers

### 4.1 Introduction

A dominant element in the contemporary Indian fiction has been the expression of women's wrecked psyche in the modern world. Anjana Appachana is one of those few Indian women novelists whose predominant interest is to highlight the psychic conditions of women that are purely subjective.

Anjana explores the inner layers of married women and discovers that they are doggedly under the impression that their lives are hollow and hopeless in the "domestic ordinary, repetitive world."<sup>1</sup> One is primarily drawn to Anjana's novel Listening Now because of the lucidity with which it presents the fundamental dilemma that married women face in the absurd domestic world. They face a senseless multiplicity of things that do not allow to organize themselves in any way that ensures solutions to all their problems. They believe that they are entangled to the domestic drama of absurdity permanently and there is no hope for them to get liberated.

Anjana further detects that their consciousness of absurdity indoctrinates a sense of alienation. A sense of alienation is the vital existentialistic grief to which invariably all the characters of Anjana are trapped and they are exposed to unspeakable weariness, blind stubbornness, revolting spirit, senseless anxiety and an inclination to die. She skillfully evaluates the characters and their behaviours to

prove that alienated beings become the victims of psycho-emotional violence, erupting due to the perpetuation of conflicts that emerge from within and without.

Alienation or estrangement is one of the fundamental themes that characterize existentialism. Alienation takes many forms in the modern tradition. With the creation of the modern society, people became alienated from their labour, or from God or Being. For Heidegger, the notion of alienation occurs when Being has been abandoned by humanity, and this has occurred in modern times; in fact, humanity is essentially alienated, homeless.

The Encyclopedia Britannica Micropaedia. Vol.1 defines the term alienation as this:

Alienation, in social sciences, the state of feeling estranged or separated from one's milieu, work, products of work, or self, "encompassing such variants as "... powerlessness, the feeling that one's destiny is not under one's control but is determined by external agents, fate, luck, or institutional arrangements, meaninglessness, a generalized sense of purposelessness in life... cultural estrangement, the sense of removal from established values in society, and ... self-estrangement, perhaps the most difficult to define, and in a sense the master theme, the understanding that in one way or another the individual is out of touch with himself."<sup>2</sup>

Alienation is the process whereby people turn weird and peculiar to the world they are living in. After 1940's there was a wide spread of a trend especially prominent in the existential philosophy of great theorists to perceive a human being as an isolated existent who is thrown into a strange universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent value or meaning and to represent the human value that is indistinguishable from nothingness. Sartre while defining the concept of humanism explains that fundamentally man is an isolated being: "man is constantly out side of himself; in projecting himself, in losing himself outside of himself, he makes for man's existing."<sup>3</sup>

The literary works of Sartre and Camus deal extensively with the theme of alienation, because they as existentialists believe that each individual is

fundamentally alone. One's essential lack of communion with others makes the individual ultimately responsible for his or her own decisions. The individuals either feel they are part of the human institutions--the society or the family nor can they understand their workings. They live in alienation from their own family and society. They repeatedly keep saying they are alone. They do not have a sense of having roots in a meaningful past nor do they see themselves as moving toward a meaningful future. As a result, they say that they do not belong to the past, to the present, or to the future. Yet they are far from forgetting it or escaping from it. Anjana's women cling to the world but do not wish to abandon it. They do not cherish any sense of belonging and also find difficult to dispossess it. They begin to live as strangers in their own place. Camus calls this state of being in exile.

The novelist highlights the existential predicaments of her women characters who live in an atmosphere that is not worst or disgusting for anyone to survive. Padma, who works as a lecturer, is highly educated, fashionable in outlook and forward in thinking, She is a fortunate woman gifted with a decent job, good friends and caring relatives. But that has not in any way helped her to be practical in her thinking and in action. Her reckless resolutions taken at odd hours bring sorrows in her life. Her adamant nature and self-conceited behaviour cause troubles to her well wishers. She is diffident and less courageous. It is only her daughter's willpower that makes her progressively think about a future without her lover, Karan.

Padma's mother, sister and friends are also alienated beings. They always lament their loneliness. Anjana most painfully points out that all her women characters, who are conscious of their isolated state, mar their inter-personal relationships forgetting their potentiality to make their life meaningful. She gives detailed description of such situations where alienation and hostility arise within the family between parents and children, between husband and wife and between children. Alienation affects all human relations, and, most cruelly, alienation dominates the relationship of love, making it valueless and meaningless. It does not let them to make a progress in their existence. Transcendence seems to be an impossible venture for them. The only positive quality to be found common in them is their intention to survive even amidst the absurd situations.

#### **4.2 Rukmani and Her Endorsement of Silence**

The protagonist's mother Rukamni is absolutely an existential character. Her life is nothing but the dramatization of perpetual meaninglessness, futility and absurdity of human existence. Her marital life and her maternal obligations persuade her to confront challenges and accept absurd situations that limit her freedom, abate her desires and make her life incomplete and complicated.

Anjana shows great insight into the character of Rukmani. For Rukmani, marriage is an incident which trains women to give silence as the answer to the conflicting demands that they face as passive wives and as nonchalant and non-interfering mothers. She believes that as an alienated being she is growing in a

vacuity and that she is not wanted by others. She is always conscious of her forlorn state in the family where her husband and daughters amuse each other:

“They amused each other, father and daughter, indulgence like water lapped gently around their relationship. Amusement and indulgence, the domain of fathers and daughters. Not for mothers and daughters. Never for husbands and wives. No such simplicity here. "(344)

Rukmani has a desire for belongingness and fulfilling intimate interaction with her family members but she finds difficult to move freely with them and for her inefficiency, she has an excuse that an attempt to interfere is to develop a chasm that shall remain unhealed between a husband and wife and a mother and her children:

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. 339 )

At the age of fourteen Rukmani gets married and learns that intellect is needless for her existence. She sturdily believes that her marriage would have

been a failure if she has made a flamboyant display of her knowledge and intellectualness before her husband.

Marriage and motherhood demanded common sense and intuition and not brains.... For a woman to sustain her intellectual abilities meant neglecting the home and children; to sustain the home and children meant neglecting the life of the mind. The choice was clear. Intellect got you nowhere in the kitchen. ( 345 )

Rukmani's relinquishes her authority as it is futile. She finds no scope for the dissolved ego in man and marital relationship and hence stoops herself to raise her husband's sense of patriarchal pride and egoism. She is firm in determining her status inferior to her husband only to save the integrity of the family. She never lets any one, not even her daughter to discover her inferior state. Shanta misinterprets her behaviour and says that 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.(187)

Rukmani is consigned to the endless task of running her family as an integrated one, and she becomes clearly conscious of the extent of her torment, of

her own misery. By this recognition, thus pivoting within her, she continues to perform her role as a wife. She recognizes the necessity to accept the present conditions than looking into the past. She justifies her action saying that if a woman is anchored to the institution of marriage and attains motherhood she should not "sustain her intellectual abilities" (345). Instead she should "command respect" (345) for her pattern of marital and maternal behaviours -- all sacrificing and all silent. Anjana instills in her, a passion to experience the present. After all the absurd is a revolt against tomorrow and as such comes to terms with the present. Similarly Rukmani compromises with the present and remain a passive woman. As a conformist she accepts life as it is and surrenders herself to its vagaries. The external stress does not disturb her much. She uses silence as an instrument to thrive in her 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. Mouth closed gently over a captive tongue, that was, the knowledge as inborn as a baby's instinct to open its mouth and suckle. (340).

However, her silence and passivity help her only to survive but not to make the existence meaningful, or find a value in human experience. There is internal

split between her acts and thoughts. Her mental equilibrium is jolted whenever she realizes that her husband and children are blind to her distinctiveness and superiority as a wife and a mother. She longs for recognition.

Rukmani who says that she “was attuned to what a marriage and what a husband required” (339) does not get integrated with her relations in an intimate manner. It is in this duality of her nature, her own individuality and normalcy of life get neglected. Hers is mere adjustments to diversities and conflicting situations existing in the family. She neither changes her personality or the others’ to bring harmony. Her husband's and daughters' academic interests and rational thinking and analysis are totally against her conventional attitudes, that she does not intend participating in them. According to her they are meaningless and "utterly useless" (344). Reading, thinking and speaking are luxuries that are forbidden for a wife and a mother. She completely rejects such inherent faculties in human beings and longs for unity which she believes that she can attain only in the acceptance of being a subservient partner to her husband, willingly absorbing all inflicted miseries and humiliation of male ego and as a mother shedding of her individual self for the sake of her children. A deviation from this and "thinking about relationship is like starving the children." (345)

Rukmani's lack of communication gives rise to unprecedented crisis which shatters her psyche and the process of thinking. Her sense of isolation intensifies and forces her to negate reason and accept faith. Rukmani's faith in the

subordination of women and suppression of feminine desires split up matrimonial ties. The relationship between Rukmani and her husband appears cordial with no chance for any differences to surface but a cold war goes in between them. She feels hurt when he fails to understand her, and this attitude of him shows his image as an insensitive husband.

Rukmani never demands the gratification of her physical desire and that is taken for granted by her husband. Till his death, she is conscious of the love that has not been adequately and appropriately given to her by him and the thought of it is troubling her. She continues to grieve about it silently. She knows that making love involves intimacy and closeness. Pathetically, she has received only perfunctory responses from her husband during their love-making. She feels assaulted by this state of loneliness, devoid of love - the love that she does not want to relate with literature, books and knowledge. She knows she has been loved by her husband but that is insufficient for her mind that craves for mental and physical closeness. She knows that the love her husband has for her is like anybody's need of bread for survival -- nothing more than that; no luxury; no need to understand the recipient's mood; no mode of delivery or acceptance. Rukmani never shares any of her feminine problems and pains with her husband. According to her he is an unresponsive man:

For Him her periods and miscarriages merged into one another; a woman's problem, " as they called it in those days, 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.(392)

Rukmani's intention is to give an impression that she is a good wife. She has no rebellious instincts. She neither complains about her grievance to others nor make them understand her problems. Rukmani always takes recourse to silence, self-deception and self-consolation to conceal her predicaments:

In her own case what would have breaking her silence been worth? Nothing. And she would have lost that most precious to her—her dignity. She would have lost that most precious thing that He had given her—his reverence... given her complete freedom in the running of the house and the bringing up of the children...He had said nothing to her, but she hadn't needed Him to. The knowledge of His complete dependence on her was enough....(341)

Rukmani fails to recognize that her lack of effective communication and her silence are truly the reasons for disintegrating the family by disrupting her married life and also her maternal responsibilities. When her daughter, Padma

ruins her life due to her premarital sexual affair and unwanted pregnancy, as a mother she is obligated to take a crucial decision. For the first time, even without informing her husband she goes out courageously to settle Padma's life. But we find Rukmani's "single act of monumental courage" (347) is not appreciated by her husband. She fears that she shall be deprived of her status as a wife: "He had said, "Next time you go, you can stay with her."(341) He expresses his anger in such a way, that Rukmani is unable to extend her support for her daughter further. Rukmani's helpless state and indecisive nature strengthened by her untimely silence bring great problems to Padma.

Padma's future becomes exigent and enigmatic. She is terribly shocked at her mother's uncaring and unsympathetic behaviour. She casts away all her hope in her family. Family is the main immediate fragment of society. Within its structural fold it contains two important kin bonds- matrimonial and filial. These primary ties are universally appreciated and treasured. Nevertheless these relationships strengthen or weaken under the multi-dimensional pressures and tension of human life and the in-built personality traits of the individuals concerned. As Robert A. Baron opines;

Sometimes these relationships develop into the most positive ties and sometimes they degenerate into cumbersome bonds. There are certain personality attributes and situational influences that help

increase interpersonal harmony between very dissimilar individuals to tolerate and sometimes to like one another.<sup>4</sup>

Rukmani helplessly witnesses her family becoming disintegrated and dysfunctional because of her “personality attributes,” inactiveness and irresolute nature. Her philosophy of life is punctured by her children who make her believe that she is an isolated being. Her two daughters, Shanta and Padma, run to her only at the hours of crisis seeking solace. But on most occasions they find no meaning in her motherhood and are forgetful of her sacrifices. She ardently yearns that they, especially Shanta who has "eroded her mother, acid like" (348) "remember the trauma of birth"(349) to comprehend the value of maternity and its significance. Her children's lack of interest towards her reminds her of the past and of the terrible pain she had undergone as a young mother. She derives a sense of futility:

What did you think about when you were young? When had she ever been young? Married at fourteen, a mother at sixteen, three children, innumerable miscarriages, a womb that never stopped bleeding, a tumor within that grew and grew and poisoned her body because the doctor said she was imagining the pain, out with the tumor, out with the womb. All before thirty....(350-351)

Rukmani anchors upon nostalgia and reflects on lamentations that her children have brought forth upon themselves due to wrong conception of love, life

and marriage. All her existential experiences as a wife and a mother provide her with a knowledge about the ineffectuality of love and matters connected with it.

Connections, connections, her daughters were forever making connections. Connections between thought and action, connections between marriage and love and the so-called act of love, this too they attributed significance to. But it was insignificant, irrelevant. The problem was that they associated the act with love. But the act was as far removed from love as it was from the child who was the result of the act, What did it partake of tenderness? What did she have to do with it? For Him it was a release, as imperative as an itch that must be scratched, She was the means of assuaging that itch.(368)

Anjana here talks about the inconsistent mind of both the mother and daughters. Rukmani, who believes that she happens to be a good wife, is incapacitated while performing her role as a mother of the three children. They are unsatisfied with her maternal instincts and renderings. Anguished, she complains:

All three of them unforgiving, unforgetting. Not towards Him. Towards her. Shanta, born unforgiving. For every thing Shanta had blamed her, all her life for every thing. Nothing she had done was right for Shanta. Always watching, waiting, comparing. Always accusing her mother of favouritism, of hypocrisy. Attributing

meanings to each innocent act. Storing it all up in her mind to pull out when she fought. Never forgetting, never. Not to this day. If Shanta could remember the trauma of birth then for that also she would have blamed her mother. (349)

The son and daughters create within Rukmani a sense of incompleteness. Her realization of her children's dissatisfaction disappoints her and takes away her spirit and strength. In the death house, where the final funeral rites of her dead husband are performed, she sits there grief stricken over the solitary state that has been thrust on her. She fears being rejected by her children, including her grand daughter. It is only from her granddaughter, Mallika, she has received an "out pouring gratitude of love"(351):

Instead of praying for him she found herself praying that God would protect her from Mallika's rejection. From Padma's rejection. From Shanta's, from Madhav's. She found herself begging Him silently to give her strength to bear it when it happened. And then, just in case, she prayed that it might not happen. (353)

The children aggravate her anxiety further in the death-house by fighting over the sharing of property. Shanta and Padma quarrel with Madhav when his wife takes away all their mother's jewels. Rukmani feels absolutely shattered to see their ill behaviour: "No reconciliation then. No forgiving, no burying the past." (357) At the same time, she is aware that she can have no control over her children

and that she is entirely a dependent of her son and her daughter-in-law with whom she shall be living. As a defenseless person she talks to herself: "I did not promise her, she wanted to say but could not. It is them I have to live with. Not you. Till the day I die."(360) An incapability to exert her authority makes her crumble and infuse self-pity. In a pitiable manner and unmindful of her daughters' disappointment she tells them, defending her daughter in-law: " 'Ratna is keeping my things safely for me. Do not misunderstand simple things.' "(359)

Rukmani bears resemblance to Nanda Kaul in Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain. Both Rukmani and Nanda Kaul have a life choked with children and mundane activity. Throughout their lives they submit to the requirements of their husband's and children's desires. Towards the end of their life Nanda Kaul withdraws from the world and leads a life of a recluse while Rukmani continues to live as a dependent finding no chance to be on her own. Like Sisyphus Rukmani is persistent in her efforts even while facing insurmountable challenges. She behaves as though she has nothing to protest against, show her displeasure or deny the hopelessness of existentialism. She comes to terms with the limited range of possibilities and the conflicting demands existing in her married life. Her act of self discovery and self-realisation help her to accept her existential conditions in her alienated state with out any revolting sense. Silence is the answer for all her troubles that arise due to her sense of estrangement. She learns to invalidate her fate by her patience, silence and compliance.

Through the character of Rukmani, Anjana discusses women's recognition of the limited power of the mother figure and the depth of their pain in the institution of marriage.

### **4.3 Shanta's Existential Angst and Its Ineffectiveness**

Shanta's story is the story of an alienated woman, a wife and a mother. Her alienation is that of the one that is conditioned by the anxiety that arises due to her consciousness of her situations at home.

Shanta's character draws both our dissatisfaction and sympathy. Hers is a waste of a potentially creative life. Anjana portrays her as a woman condemned to hopelessness and a deranged mental state on account of thwarted desires and unfulfilled urges. Shanta imagines that she is trapped in absurdity with all her strengths and limitations, muddling through meaningless existence. Her pervading sense of loneliness is the result of an anger which enfolds her hatred for a world that compels her to sacrifice her self and render ceaseless routine duties as a housewife and a mother. Anjana gives vivid picture of her existential angst boiling with rage: "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."(159)

Shanta does not attach her thoughts or ideas to any fixed nature or essence. She gives preference only to her emotions and the thoughts that overpower her that moment. Instead of developing any constructive vision, her mind envisages pessimism and hollowness in her life and that makes her to complicate the relationship with everybody. She is a hypersensitive and an intolerant woman who exerts her ill temper towards different personalities holding different mind-sets. We also find her to have inner conflicts due to contradictory dispositions within her own self.

Shanta asserts that she never endures solitude but she is the one who finds extremely difficult to adjust with her own kith and kin. Her alienation happens to be the cause for her to fume, ravage, and cry, revealing herself to be an unhappy person. It triggers of an intention to find fault with every one except her father. She has a faith that it is her father who understands her feelings, desires and emotions better than her mother:

Appa had faith in her and so long as she lived in her parents' house, his faith was rewarded. In his school she was always first in her class, in college not only did she top the university every year but participated in debates and was on the college badminton team. It was this kind of faith that one internalized, it was this kind of faith that made one fulfill the dreams others had for you. (186)

The prospects of her adjustments and understanding with others increase only when they stay in fine tune with her demands and directions. The sense of isolation is to be felt in Shanta even in her adolescence. The benevolent outpourings of her mother's love are misconstrued by her and that prevents her from being happy. She is very heartless and inconsiderate in blaming her mother. At times she understands the love and care the mother has for her, but that does not help her in overcoming her existential thinking with regard to alienation and mother's gender bias. Shanta's defiance towards her mother is a strange mingling of her envious feelings, unfulfilled ambitions and traditional options. For all her faults she blames her mother. When father hopefully wishes that she shall enter civil services or apply for the lecturer's job she dismisses his suggestions saying that she prefers to get married and further comes out with an unjustifiable and an insensible allegation against her mother:

I could have done it, Shanta thought, I could have done it. But Amma favoured Madhav. Even when he just about made a first class he got more praise from Amma than she did, she who topped her university. It was as if Madhav now represented what she could have been. All the praise her mother bestowed on him and his job and his promotions should have been hers. If only someone had that kind of faith in her again.... (186)

She aspires for a happy wedded life during her student days. Once when her brother asks her: "What did you want to do in life?" (214 ) in a simple tone with less cynicism she tells him, " 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.' " (214 ) Shanta strongly believes that parental home is not a place for her to live happily. She is annoyed with her mother's "unfairness of treatment."(200) Rukmani restricts her going out or wearing sleeveless blouses and when Shanta nags her, in an irritated mood she tells her" 'Get married and do what you want.... ' "(168) Shanta declines her father's request to solemnize her fantasy of coming across a hero romantically characterized in the love stories she has read. But to her dismay she is given to understand that marriage is not an occasion of joy or merriment:

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. (168)

She who has long believed that marriage ensures happiness now feels betrayed and also disgusted at the turn of events after her marriage. She realizes her husband, Narayana is just an ordinary man insensitive to her feelings and emotions. He is not her "dream-lover"(162): "Her dream-lover, whom she had sustained all her life, and who had sustained her till she got married, was now long dead,..."(162) She is frustrated to the core to imagine that her husband remains unsighted and inaudible of her romanticized cravings of love. She senses being isolated and that alters her entire conception of marriage giving arousal to existential pain and problems.

Shanta by her abnormal and extreme passionate outburst of her anguish temper, complicates her marital life and abruptly makes her family life an unhappy one. Her husband Narayana is depicted as the most sensible one of all the male characters in the novel. Shanta herself is aware of husband's goodness and thanks God for it, and whenever she develops any ill feeling towards him she feels guilty and pleads God for His apology: " " Krishna, Krishna, thank you, forgive me, I'll never complain about him again."(172) Ironically it happens to be "a promise that she broke easily and repeatedly" "(172). She outrageously expresses her dissatisfaction over him. According to her, he is more considerate and kind towards other women and not with her: "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?" (168) Narayana's cool and less resentful reply, "There's no point asking you to rest, you never will," (168) further augments her anger. She longs to give vent to her emotions. Before marriage, mother bore her onslaught. Now she cannot show it to anybody, not even to her children. She ponders over the futility of marriage that incapacitates a woman to exert her freedom to act, to speak and to express her emotions:

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.(169)

The estrangement between Shanta and her husband reminds one of Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock where an ever widening gap in communication between Maya and her husband is felt throughout the novel. Their married life is upset by "matrimonial silences".<sup>5</sup> Shanta's husband, Narayana, who is good to others, is

insensitive to her sufferings. She is deeply distressed to know that her husband is unlike her father: "No, Narayana was not like Appa, who gave Amma, two of the sarees every year, cash gifts and jewellery for every birthday and anniversary, who indulged his daughter Shanta and anticipated her every need, there was no one to indulge her now, no one." (180)

Shanta desires her husband to be indulgent towards her; surprising her with gifts, pampering her with applauding remarks and listening to her nostalgic reminiscents. Even a slight neglect of her expectations insinuates terrible disappointments flaring up anger. Helen Argent is right when she says that Shanta is a "chained lioness pacing in her tiny cage, seething all her life with anger that she lashes/curses people with."<sup>5</sup> Shanta seems to cherish a continuous longing for something which she never attains. The efforts she takes to bring an emotional stability within her and to heal the breach between the two souls are far from the goal of her life. She recognizes her failure and her hope vanishes. She accepts the turbulence which has penetrated into her life. She confesses her incapacity to cope with the harsh realities of domestic life:

Fury made her speechless. That was the problem. Either she couldn't find the words or when she did they were all wrong. Or she shouted them and then he did not want to hear anyway. She knew it, she knew it, yet she could not change it. Somewhere she had once read that recognizing a problem was the first step to solving the

problem. She recognized the ineffectiveness of her sharp responses and emotional arguments. But she could not change either, she just could not... (181)

Narayana tries to understand her but fails utterly. Shanta feels forlorn and neglected. The mental struggle that has been biting her endurance, gushes out in the adverse form from her anguished state of mind whenever she becomes conscious of her loneliness, boredom and absurdity. But her emotions go a waste, undetermined and undefined. She comprehends her state of powerlessness and prefers servitude to unbearable anguish and submission to freedom.

Shanta is above an average woman. She is a combination of the real and the unreal. Her ideas and activities are governed by her immatured mental attitudes. Marriage with Narayana, and birth of two boys give her no joy. Generally in Indian homes births of sons are considered to be not only occasions of joy but also boons directly blessed upon the family for all the good they have done in their previous birth. But Santa's existentialistic mind compels her to be indifferent and abnormal in her thinking. She feels devastated and openly grieves over the birth of a son:

...and it was the nurse who gave a little scream and exclaimed, “So lucky, another boy!” and Shanta’s mouth opened as if of its own accord, and a sound emerged that was so despairing that it filled the room and poured out of door in one continuous stream, and outside

in the corridor another nurse clicked her tongue and said to Padma,  
“Oho, poor thing, it must be a girl.”(215)

She considers her children are a source of anxiety, concern, and pessimism. There is a conflict between attachment and detachment internally. She is overcome by a strange desire to get rid of her own children for the sake of having a control over the maternal instincts that compellingly imagines and worries about the children’s sickness:

How children changed you, Shanta thought, you became another person when they entered your life. She, Shanta who had always been generous, so ready to find time for others, had turned into this person who hid from her children in the bathroom. She, Shanta, who had always taken every illness, her parents, in stride, now live in dread that every illness her children had would take them away from her, She couldn't live without them, if she lost them her life would be over, yet she often wished them lost, gone, away. (217-218)

Shanta yearns for changes to happen in her life but while confronting such conditions she converts her normal codes and conducts and places herself in a baffled state.

Shanta's makes much ado about her situation. She wants to live in a world of fantasy, severed from her domestic responsibilities, mental torture and physical

problems. In this state of mind she chooses to confine within the bathroom where she tries to have a thrilling experience:

In the bathroom, where she soaked in the blessed silence, her thoughts uncoiling and rising...She who had never craved for solitude in all life discovered its pleasures among the tooth brushes, the mugs, the taps and the buckets; solitude; smelt of phenyl and soap; solitude was the sound of the dripping tap and the rustle of pages between fingers... there was quite a thrill in it actually, this whole business of hiding the book and shutting yourself into the bathroom;...it kept you alive and it kept your shoulders above this daily business anyway that like an eclipse consumed much of your life so swiftly, so that you hardly noticed the day slowly darkening or the evening approaching when it should be morning, and when the unnatural night quietly fell you didn't notice that either, till one day you heard the silence. (161-162)

The bathroom turns out to be not only a world of illusion but a location to harbour her self-interest and a resort to relax. Shanta's concept of freedom is limited to reading books within that room and any disturbance infuriates her. Shanta finds that bathroom has more space to let her mind, wander freely beyond the perimeters what the social or familial circumstances have set for her in reality. She derives a pleasure while living within it, unruffled. This is a senseless

diversion what Shanta takes to forget her sufferings. Her happiness, denunciations, withdrawal and desire to take refuge inside the toilet fail to convince the readers. Most of her psychological conflicts and emotional crisis are merely the outbursts of irritation and frustration from her hollow mind.

Shanta in her state of detachment behaves abnormally. The psychic disorders that arise due to her physical inconveniences are unbearable for they persuade in her a feeling that she alone has been destined to face such tribulations and senselessly expects her husband to share her problems which in reality is impossible. Yet she dares not openly ask for it. On the contrary she compromises with a feeling that pain is not interchangeable and learns to live with it:

How could her pain ever be His! Her pain was constant. It was the way she lived. She was deformed from the beginning by all that had to be contained. It was a way of life to contain the relentless pain of her monthly periods, it was a way of life to have contained the pain of that torn, unmentionable body part after each childbirth, which refused to heal for so long. It was a way of life to have contained the pain of two miscarriages and the subsequent scraping and cleaning of her uterus. Everyone believed that she was as strong as a horse, and most often she believed it herself, for none of her physical problems incapacitated her, and her other ailments- the

head aches, the skin rashes, the low fever -- they came and they went. (167-168)

Shanta, a woman with contentious thinking fears death and at the same time has a desire to die:

She fantasized about dying or being close to death. Sometimes the former seemed preferable, they would know her worth then, all of them, its finality would bring about the realization long overdue, they would grieve bitterly. But what of Vikram and Varun and Mallika, how would they survive her death? How would Padma? She wept at the thought,.... Perhaps it was better than close to death, it would achieve the same purpose and the children would survive, and she would see the others in their agony and their fear, know at last, how much she mattered to them. But after that? Would a mighty change be wrought, would her life change its course the way rivers did leaving in their wake any devastation? Naturally not; once she recovered, life would go on, unchanged. (167)

Shanta is an educated, a married and a well settled woman but discontented person having terrible anxiety. Her expectations are abundant, enigmatic and ever-increasing that she never feels satisfied with the life that she leads: "Life, more often than not, Shanta thought, gave you what you wanted, but it did so in a nasty,

perverse way, so that when you got it (and you usually got it in full measure) it was never the way you had wanted."(214 )

Shanta's life is inconsistent with less chances for changes. She searches to find meaning for life but she does not succeed. Nothing sustains her life. Her anxiety prevents her from relating herself and her problems meaningfully to the external reality. She fails to combine the ideas of personal freedom, domestic duties and maternal responsibilities. She experiences acute mental agonies due to her existentialist sensibility arising in her state of loneliness.

#### **4.4 Madhu's Fragmented Self**

Madhu, when compared with the rest of the women characters appears to be happy maintaining good relationship with her friends, always ready to be at their disposal and cheerfully extending her help and service at all needy hours. Yet a deeper survey of her mind tells us that she is an existential person having submitted herself to agony and despair springing forth from her alienated self. Madhu has no foreground to complain of hectic domestic chores like Anuradha or feel dreadful of insecure future like Padma. Yet she always feels harassed by loneliness.

Madhu is wealthy and that is the only aspect that distinguishes her from others. But she is identical with them when examined from an existential perspective. She feels deep inside as alone as everybody:

Shanta had said that first day, "My sister is completely alone," as if Shanta thought this needed to be explained . Madhu wanted to shout, We all are, we all are. It was the same feeling that she had sometimes when she wanted to stamp her feet and cry, as she had as a child. "I want to go home. I want to go home." But she couldn't go home, her father and mother were dead. If home meant a refuge, then she didn't have one. (81)

Madhu's disinclination to get involved in any family affairs especially those concerned with financial management persuades her to persistently think of her forlorn state. Almost all women in the novel are caught in absurdity and they are stringent and thrifty in their expenditure, sacrificing their pleasures and luxuries for the sake of family. But Madhu is unlike her counterparts by being unwilling to compromise with any situations that demand being parsimonious or forgo her money-oriented interest or desire. She is reluctant to get involved with her husband's affairs and so refuses to give him money at the utmost needy hour. Her non-participation reveals her dual nature.

Madhu is fixated with a feeling that her husband is a good man. Even when she finds out certain causes to exert her anger towards him, she ignores them as she knows that her resentment is ineffective. She acquires self pleasure, imagining her husband a Samaritan with deep concern for his wife and manages to give a false impression to all that she is a lady very cheerful and self contented:

She often told Padma so." 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."(79)

Her husband's disenchanting sexual act never invokes anger in her mind. Pretending to be ignorant of her existential state she says " 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?"(68)

Madhu utters these words after realizing her helpless state. She has no rebellious instinct and meekly accepts what happens to her. She is not practical and sensible enough to manage her private life with her husband. She never takes any precautionary measures for avoiding succession of pregnancies and abortions that has been ruining her health. Madhu is anti-existential like Sartre's Estelle in "No Exit" who at times refuses to believe that she is in hell. Madhu is not honest in her expression of emotions or actions. She is a self deceptive person ever taking an "effort to run away from the dignity and dread of freedom"<sup>6</sup> David Robert observes that Sartre condemns such kind of persons, "who will not face honestly his own motives and intentions -- the man who will not see himself as he really is."<sup>7</sup>

When Madhu's husband dissuades her interest to complete her under graduation she feels disappointed. But conceals her emotion by self extinction and self deception. She consoles her aggrieved mind, imagining that her husband loves her, and since that all her wants are fulfilled by him, there is no need for her to study, go for job and earn money. That is the extremity of her pretentious behaviour:

"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." (61)

Anjana has talked repeatedly about the money problem the women characters encounter only with an intention to view the cause of the struggle involved in scarcity. Sartre gives reasons in his Being and Nothingness: "The origin of struggle always lies in fact in some concrete antagonism whose material condition is scarcity, in a particular form and the real aim is objective conquest or even creation, in relation to which the destruction of the adversary is the only means."<sup>8</sup> This is the reason that prompts Maya in Anita Desai's Cry, The Peacock

to murder her husband with whom she finds an adversary. Madhu is not so violent or neurotic like her but never withstands the situation pertaining to poor material condition and in an antagonistic temperament she finds fault with her husband.

Madhu does not wish to be stringent in her expense as Anuradha is. Just as Anuradha's husband and her mother-in law insist on less expenditure, Madhu's husband also does: " 'You have to learn to stretch it out, that what mother did' ” (83) Madhu feels offended with that managing business-- "Managing was doing without".(83) She has been very thrifty in managing the household's economic position in the past. Now, when there is sufficient income to Madhu's husband and when any thing can be bought in excess, she is again under an obligation to sacrifice and that provokes her: “In the life before it hadn't angered her, infact she had given no thought to it at all. Yet, now, when every one had had two helpings of rasagullas and one she hadn't had any and he affectionately said to her, "Have one more, Madhu," she wanted to throw the empty plate at him.”(84)Rasagulla may be an ordinary sweet but she does not want to be deprived off it. Sacrifice is not her choice.

Madhu's garrulous temperament and bold deportment give an impression that she is a courageous woman who can survive in the confused and absurd world with confidence. In reality, she is an existential being who continuously ponders upon her responsibility as a wife and a mother and self interrogates to find out if

she has been discharging her duties in the right sense and to the fullest satisfaction of all. She suffers mainly of her conscience that ever reminds about her guilt.

The sense of guilt has curtailed Madhu's quest to explore more sense and meaning in her marital life. She is thwarted by her own self in her ambition of becoming a true wife to her husband, and that is exercising a damaging influence upon her psyche. She imagines herself to be imperfect for she has not sublimated her desires inspite of her mother's advise: "Beti, Listen, you have to learn to do without. One day our marriage will require you to do it without thinking; remember, marriage is not song and dance like the films you want to see, marriage means sublimating your desires, so learn to do that now."(82-83) Her sense of imperfection and incompleteness as a wife prompts her to look for some reasons to weep, complain or get angry towards herself:

She found herself lingering over little details, she found herself going back obsessively to past incidents, sometimes she felt her insides becoming so knotted that she wanted to scream. She hated herself then. Look at Anu, she would tell herself...how she works from morning to night. Look at Padma, all alone, so alone, and look how much she has to work to secure for herself and her daughter. Neither of them complain. They have more to be angry about, they have the real problems, not you, think of them and be satisfied. But her unruly mind would not listen.(84)

Madhu's main problem is to face the task of ' being-for- itself'. She lacks faith in herself being a woman and also a wife.

Madhu lacks confidence and depends on others for boosting her image as a woman with a "big heart"(80) It is only through the mediation of another she obtains any truth what so ever about herself. Madhu as Padma says is "underestimating" (82) herself and thinking that she does not deserve the life that she has lived in the past or that she lives in the present. When some one flatters her -- " 'You are God's gift to me.' "(81) or " 'You have a big heart.'" (80) - she shudders and turns a neurotic person. Her past has shrouded her with a guilty sense that she never wishes any one to recall:

She had closed her mind to That Life till Padma had opened it again... when she went back home the thoughts would whirl round and round and she would find her self distracted and ill- tempered. The problem in thinking about the Life Before was that it was like recalling someone you had known intimately who had died without warning[...] (81)

Madhu's nostalgia acquires a dreadful dimension whenever Padma kindles it. Past is rooted deep in her "unruly mind"(84) that "she goes back obsessively to past incidents"(84 ) It creates an uneasy feeling that suffocates her and make her feel terribly fed up of life. The past reminds her of unpleasant happenings and the present constantly compels her to self interrogate and foresee what her future

shall chance to be. She searches herself to know where she belongs - either to the present or to the past and in her endeavour she undergoes a psychic tension.

She comprehends that her life is a fragmented one - a "life before" (81) and a "life after" (81). She leads a life of uncertainty between her past trauma, present ordeals and future apprehensions. She does not have any hope or confidence in spite of the material comforts, liberally provided to her by her husband. Financial independence liberates her but only at the exterior level. Her perception of Padma's lonely status and her widowhood create a kind of fear psychosis in her and she becomes suspicious of her future. She fears whether death shall snatch away her happiness. She prays for her family's safety:

It seemed that Death was just around the corner, waiting to grip its tentacles around her children; every illness they survived was because she wrestled so fiercely with it. When she prayed, she prayed only for her children. Something inside her whispered that the minute she began asking favours for herself or even for Him, God would give it at the expense of her children. Unless of course, she was dying, then to ask to live would be for her children, not for herself (68)

Madhu's love for her children and family, her flaunts as a gregarious person and her self-deceptive demeanour only help her to trounce her traumatic situations that she encounters as a fragmented being, partially. Her sense of fulfillment is

only an exterior built image and within her a storm rages for no reason. She is unreal in her disposition. Her self-knowledge never helps her to free herself of guilt, fear and anxiety.

#### **4.5 Anuradha's Ordeal and Acceptance**

In Anjana Appachana the delineation of inner crisis occupies the major part of her fiction. Through the character of Anuradha, Anjana portrays the inner struggle of an alienated woman to express herself, to discover her real self through her inner and inborn characteristics.

Anuradha feels alienated and exiled while staying in a crowd. Even then she never feels the lack of culture around her. Her psyche is affected by the culture and this works as a life-force which dictates her married life and living. Her perception of the pitfalls, hypocrisy, exploitation, oppression and victimization of women in marriage gets sharpened. She discovers that marriage is no more than surrendering of values and distortion of her identity.

Anuradha's predicaments commence the moment she enters into the family as newly wedded bride. Insignificant nuptials make her to disown the identity and there begins her odyssey around her psychic entrails in search of it..

It is customary in Northern part of India to rename the bride to signify that she is newly born and also as a manifestation of love. Anuradha is named as Sumathi after marriage. But she is not called by the new name. She is addressed as "Bahurani" (112) by her mother-in-law, "Babhi" (112) by her sister-in-law and

remains nameless to her husband. Dispossessed of both the names as Anuradha and Sumathi and being addressed in different names bring about great changes in her personality. She realizes the life's futility and the absurdity of existence without self identity:

“ Then what is your name , Mumma?”

Anirudh beta, I don't have a real name,” struck she began to laugh.’

”Madhu aunty and padma aunty call you Anu, Mumma.”

“ Then, beta, for them that is my real name.”....

But Dadima calls you Bahurani and Bhabi.”

“ And Daddy, he doesn't call you anything.”

What he does not call me, that is my real name too.” (112)

Anuradha does not consider the practice of naming the new bride in a positive way and interprets subscribing to a cultural code where her identity becomes subjected to subordination and repression.

Anuradha feels extremely difficult to confront the harsh realities of marital life. Leaving her parental home she begins to live with her husband. Her husband's home signifies a place of meaninglessness where she feels a stranger, isolated and lonely. She develops a feeling that she is in 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. (120)

She feels she has been victimized in the name of customs and practices. She pays a heavy dowry to satisfy the needs and demands of her husband and his family. When all her jewels are taken away by her mother-in-law, immediately after the wedding she is terribly shocked and stands tongue-tied unable to enquire her.

And the things she wanted to ask mataji, there just didn't seem to be an appropriate time for it. How to ask a newly widowed mother-in-law, Mataji, the jewels that my mother gave me at the time of my marriage, which you said you would keep in the locker, do youi have them with you here? How to say to her, Mataji, those five Benarsi sarees that my mother gave me when I got married, which you put away for safe keeping, can I have them? [...] (120)

Anuradha's responses to such situation is horrifying. She wallows in self-pity and conceals her powerlessness to revolt with insensible humility and pointless anxiety. She is strongly convinced that women cannot reject bad faith that exists in the form of traditional believes and customary practices and gradually becomes docile in her demeanours, dexterous in domestic chores and an

ardent follower of family rites and rituals as demanded by the culture. Her obsession with the astrology and horoscope shows that she is woman assaulted by her own doubts and uncertainty. When the child is hardly one month old, she has her horoscope cast by Astrologers.

They say that she should have been a boy with a "personality -- headstrong, obstinate, ambitious, she will do what ever she wants to do, nothing will stop her , nobody will stop her. She will get many degrees, she will travel overseas, perhaps she will work there, she will rise to the top of her profession, get great recognition."(123)

Anuradha develops an irrational fear about the masculine quality, her daughter shall acquire in future and expresses her apprehensiveness, that "no one will want to marry her..."(125) to her husband who dismisses it as absurd and insignificant. He forgets the fact that he has married Anuradha only after scrutinizing the matching astronomical elements. Anuradha is terribly shocked at his absent mindedness:

Later that day Anu had repeated her fears to him. He had responded in exasperation , " one month old she and you are talking of her marriage ! Why do you believe in that astrology nonsense? All that nonsense, she wanted to tell Him, was the reason why we get married. all because ... I am a manglik. (125)

Anuradha realizes that she has been trapped by marriage which emphasizes on her twin obligations for its sustenance. She is obliged to take care of her husband and his family members first and secondly she has to forfeit her desires and even her basic needs for their sake. She knows that all her experiences are primarily defined through interpersonal relationships: serving the needs of others. Anuradha's identity exists largely as being-for-others rather than being - for itself. Her husband tells her, "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 .... (121-2)

Anuradha's efforts to reduce the domestic expenditure does not help the family to satisfy its monetary needs. Mother- in-law continues to grumble--" 'Like water, you spend the money he gives you' "(122) and her sacrifice goes unnoticed otherwise trivialized by her husband -- " 'A small sacrifice like that, and such a big tirade. You have to learn to be less selfish....' "(138) A dissonance is struck between the human relationship as the outcome of domestic absurdity.

Anjana's narrative art adds pathos to the empty married life of Anuradha. She turns desperate by virtue of her meaningless marriage. She has a vacuum

inside and outside both. Bored with the mundane domestic chores and its absurdity, she incurs inexorable psychic injuries. She is unable to recognize the impact of time, its existentialist significance as destroyer and the changes it brings in her life. She is also astonished at the changed attitude of her husband with whom she had sweet relation once.

Anuradha recalls to her mind the happy moments, experienced at the time of wedding -“Marriage was a joy.”(118) These moments become extinct with the passage of time moving ahead and her husband drifting apart. By recalling she is hurt. Her feelings are wounded. She feels insulted. She comprehends the cause of changes in the intimate relationship. For her, marital alienation is unbearable. Her relationship with her husband is marked by loneliness and improper communication. She earnestly takes effort to search for real meaning in life but she is utterly frustrated. Her passivity, anguish, anxiety, compromise, revolt, laughter and her anger takes her nowhere or bring her anything.

Anjana dramatises the irretrievable conflict between the husband and wife and their relatives – Anuradha, on one side and her husband, Prasad and his mother, on another side. Anuradha with the intensified sense of estrangement, believes that her abundant love for all the family members is not reciprocated in the same proportion as that of hers and that is disappointing her. She is constantly under the impression that her husband is oblivious to her difficulties and is bereft of any love for her. This generates existential angst:

Sometimes when she was arguing with him, he would say, "Are, Bhai, two and two do not make five, do not imagine things," and she would get so infuriated that she could never explain what she meant. He never lost his temper, that was the problem, and with him she was always losing hers, not about the things, she should have got angry and shouted about, but about other things, little things, things that she needn't have brought up, while the bigger things remained unspoken to all but Padma and Madhu. (113)

She gets most of the time angry and indulges in ceaseless arguments with futile results. Her husband's reactions to her anger, replies to her anguish queries and response to her bitter cries and complaints stand evidences to their complicated inter personal relationship. Anu imagines that her problems are trivialised by her husband. She blames him, " "You just don't understand.' " (131) Less perturbed, he responds to her telling that she magnifies trivial issue: " 'I understand you very well. The problem with you is that all your problems are self-inflicted.' "(131) Anuradha turns desperate and also angry due to his dismissal of her passionate outburst and his failure to understand her psychic emotion. Her happiness has been robbed by the meddlesome relatives and her husband whom she discovers to be insensitive. To define in Sartrean terms, the other is indispensable in Anuradha's life and she has countless experiences that demand her to give-up her desires in reality. Prolonged smothering of self-interest by

women that expresses the vanity of their lives throttled under domesticity, encourages the author to visibly observe the performance of sacrifice of their selfhood as meaningless.

According to Anuradha, her mother-in-law is the trouble maker and her prejudiced remarks are the impediments to her quest for self identity. She fears that her efforts to speak in English shall make her mother-in-law to imagine that she is a self-interested and a self-conceited person. She pleads Padma –“Don’t tell. Mataji will think I am giving myself too much importance.”(109). She subdues her desire to listen to and sing classical music. She learns to cast away her interests and sublimate her requirements to make others happy.

Her mother-in-law’s clumsy and pretentious behaviour in the kitchen compels her to continue her household duties even during her pregnancy. Her husband is under the impression that his mother is doing all the work and so ignores her sufferings. Anuradha is highly exhausted and turns schizophrenic. She earnestly prays for miscarriage to teach him a lesson for being insensitive to her difficulties: " 'Let me have a miscarriage, God, she prayed, “let it all come out. Then he’ll know.’ "(116) Her anxiety results in her abortion.

Anuradha does not communicate nor express heartily and apparently her expectations, her feelings towards her in-laws or of her humiliating experiences on the streets to her husband. If she talks about them, she does it in the wrong context and on the wrong occasions, having little effect on her husband. She

knows that the so-called radical husband is nothing but always frigidly silent or coldly dialectical. This complicates the situation, and intensifies her sense of victimization. But Anuradha intends to reconcile the estranged relationship by wearing a mask of artificiality at least as part of her victimization in married life.

Laughter, either natural or artificial one, is the means through which she decides to wipe her tears and live or pretend to live as a happy person: " ' Living I have to do in this life. Bas, I want to live happily... If I don't laugh than I'll cry. Better to laugh, no? "....One has to live, no?. Better to do it one day at a time.' "(111) Laughter is a humanizing force that she uses against her mother -in law to infuriate her and in sequence minimize her own anxiety:

Like anything else, laughter too had to be learnt, The other laughter, the kind that had always been so much part of her nature, that was not enough. Once there had been joy in the smallest things, laughter had risen and bubbled out of her as naturally as a mountain spring. Then later she had realized it had to be sought. This is your life now, she told herself. As much happiness as you can get out of it, get, there is no other place to get it from. Bas, it worked. And what joy there was in not letting Mataji get the better of her the way she had the first year of her marriage. It had worked so well that a year after her marriage Mataji had snapped at her one morning, " At least early in the morning show a little bit of restraint

when you smile- all her teeth she shows as if she is advertising for tooth paste," She can't bear it, Any thought joyfully, she can't bear it!  
"(111)

Anuradha uses her imaginative skill as another factor of artificiality to dilute her existential agony.

In her imaginary conversations with him, she could tell him what was in her mind. In her imaginary conversations with him, she understood herself, was able to find the words for all that agitated, amorphous mass inside her. She could say, See, this is two, this is two, and two and two equals four. She could say it calmly, logically. And he, on hearing her in their conversations, would understand and be filled with consternation and remorse. She talked to him as worked in the kitchen, and in these talks there was satisfaction because he lost his brutal calm... (113)

Anuradha puts up with the orthodox culture around her, nurtures her sense of forbearance and compromises with the existential condition, the condition of being powerless and helpless by compelling her self:

Perspective. That was what happiness was. That sharp, quivering feeling which she had known in the early days of her marriage, that wasn't happiness, it was something else. Happiness was the absence of unhappiness, not its opposites. If unhappiness

meant being plunged into depths, then happiness had its reign not in the heights, but in the plains. Its nature was not blissful but calm, it did not heighten one's sense but dulled them. It was that middle ground one had to seek in order to live. (155)

To sum up the discussion it can be said that Anjana is interested in extraordinary women characters rather than ordinary ones who are not conscious of anything that happens within them or outside them. All her characters show a distinct tendency towards neurotic behaviour. In some of them there is abnormality and eccentricity. Anjana has explored the difficulties of women which they create or magnify on their own because of their in-built personality traits. They negate anything that is possible for them to make their life meaningful. They complicate their relationship due to their lack of communication or pseudo-communication. Their marital ties are annihilated as a result of their despair and disillusionment. The man-woman relationship in the novel lacks the essential prerequisite -- trust and confidence in each other -- for a happy marital life. The women's preconceived notions about marriage and patriarchy make them impracticable never allowing them to face the reality.

Reality is unbearable for most of the characters. They deceive themselves in the name of accountability. They struggle to attain happiness and fulfillment at the cost of their freedom to make a choice. Sartre uses the term 'bad faith' to

explain such conditions of human beings. He compares bad faith with lying.

Tanweer Akram substantiates the Sartrean concept of bad faith in detail:

The human being hide himself from freedom by self-deception, acting like a thing, as if he is passive subject, instead of realizing the authentic being for the human being; this is bad faith. In bad faith the human beings shelter himself from responsibility by not noticing the alternative courses of action facing him; in bad faith, the human beings behaves as others demand of him by confirming to the standards of accepted values and by adopting roles designed for him; in bad faith, the human being loses the autonomy of his will, his freedom to decide; in bad faith human being imprisons himself within in authenticity for he has refused to take the challenge of responsibility and the anxiety that comes along with his freedom.<sup>9</sup>

There is always ambiguity and mystery around these women characters. Anuradha is right when she says, "The Truth was, you showed that much of yourself which it was easy to show, and what you showed wasn't the whole thing. The rest, like an iceberg lay underneath, and the tip which was what you saw, made the rest a lie." (110) The readers understand that these "...women never really show their real selves."<sup>10</sup> Their self deception, secret activities and lies infuriate the readers and they wish that these women characters either

progressively modify themselves and their attitude towards life through conformity or rebel for changes and walk out of the conditions that threaten their existence.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

#### 5.1 Introduction

The discussions in the preceding chapters have shown the interaction between Existential philosophy and the narrative practices of Anjana Appachana in her novel Listening Now. The diverse strands of thoughts and philosophy pertaining to Existentialism as established in the works of Sartre and Camus have

been applied to Anjana Appachana's novel Listening Now and her women characters.

The discussion has begun with an introductory chapter in which a brief study is carried out to trace the development of Indian writing in English followed with an evaluation of Indian women novelists and an analysis of Anjana Appachana's short stories and her novel Listening Now. English that had been used as a medium to express the nationalistic feeling to the rulers was exploited to awaken the social sense in the minds of Indians. This immediately had an impact all around and many more writers came into the literary field with a cause to work as benefactors for the society and simultaneously excel as creative writers in English which led to the growth and development of Indian writing in English as an independent one with particular characteristics. Indianness that was present in English writings made Indo-Anglican literature distinctive. We are never to forget the contributions of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K Narayan of the earlier period.

In the early part of twentieth century there was hardly any fiction written by Indian women. But things began to change for women writers after India's Independence. The first generation of women writers began creating their works of art in 1950s and most of their works were social novels and female-centered. Kamala Markandaya's career as a writer begins with Nectar in a Sieve published in 1954. Nectar in a Sieve is the tale of Rukmani and Nathan, and through them

the story of the changing lifestyle of the village, is narrated in first person by Rukmani. The author gives much importance not only to farmers problems but also to Rukmani's feelings and thoughts, her sufferings and struggle. Rukmani is not an educated woman yet she is gifted with the presence of mind that helps her to assess the situation in which she is placed and act in a remarkable manner. Nalini in Markandaya's A Handful of Rice is also submissive that she tolerates with great sense of fortitude her husband's fanciful and impractical dreams and senseless emotional outbursts. Lady Caroline in Possession seems to belong to a different category. In the character of Caroline, Markandaya has transformed "the patriarchal suppressed woman into a domineering and tyrannical possessor and an active victimizer of an adolescent man."<sup>1</sup>

We find Kamala Markandaya trying to project a new image of women in all her novels. Nayantara Sahgal published her first novel A Time To Be Happy in 1956. Sahgal's progress as a novelist, bears testimony to the fact that she has been moving towards a definite feminist position. The Day in Shadow gives sensitive account of the suffering of a divorced woman, Simrit in Indian society. In Rich Like Us, Sahgal talks about woman's position objectively where power is monopolized by men.

The 1960s was a very significant period for women's writing. It was in this decade Anita Desai emerged as a novelist. She is one of those women novelists who have exposed the predicaments of her female characters psychically in her

eight novels. She calls her novels purely subjective. Through her themes, characterization and images about women's confinement and lack of freedom, Desai has raised significant questions regarding the status and role of women in the society. She published her Cry the Peacock in 1963 and Voices in the City in 1965. The 1970s witnessed several new novelists like Shashi Deshpande and Bharathi Mukerjee publishing their works along with Markandaya, Sahgal and Desai. Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self; an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Roots and Shadows was published after her The Dark Holds No Terrors. If I Die Today marks the beginning of the quest of women for her self. The theme is continued in her later novels That Long Silence and A Matter of Time. Bharathi Mukerjee considers herself as the exponent of the experiences made possible by immigration, as evident in her collection Middleman and Other Stories. The immigrant's identity is best seen in her novel Jasmine. In her Tiger's Daughters, the protagonist, Tara's efforts to get acclimatized to American society are measured based on her attitude towards Indian way of living in an alien country. Mukerjee's Wife cannot be treated as an immigrant novel. The novel is about the main character, Dimple's abnormal psychic problems.

After the late 1980s, there was an immense growth of fiction writing by women in India and Indian women abroad. Among the notable writers of recent

years Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Deivakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri and Anjana Appachana have won literary awards and recognition for their native touch and Diasporic consciousness. Anjana Appachana, the author who has been chosen for the research purpose, has contributed an anthology of short stories Incantation and Other Short Stories and one novel Listening Now to the readers all around the world.

## **5.2 Anjana Appachana as a Creative Writer**

Reading Anjana Appachana's short stories and her novel we come to know that she is a writer who has understood a woman both as a woman and as a person who has been pressurized by all kinds of visible and invisible, external and internal forces. Her literary works suggest that she is not carried away by fetishes but she is a writer who is mature enough to perceive the factual truth and reality pertaining to women's problems in a very feminine way.

Anjana's career as a writer commences with an anthology of short stories Incantation and Other Short Stories. Physical discomfort is considered to be the major modern marital agony that women experience. Anjana Appachana through her character, Bahu in the story "Bahu" reveals the truth that educated, modern working women shall never desire to physically exert themselves and slog for the family. There is certainly a boldness in them as they take what they desire without hesitation. Anjana allows Bahu to snip off matrimonial chords in an

unorthodox manner, and liberates both her body and mind from mundane conditions.

Sangeetha, in the story "Incantations", a day prior to her wedding is seduced by her husband, Nikhil's brother Abhinay. She fears if she discloses this to others, there are chances for the marriage to be stopped causing profuse discomfiture to herself and her parents. In order to let her marriage take place, she determines to conceal the matter. Her sole intention is to save her marriage and not to think of the sanctity attached to it. Even after her marriage she endures her brother-in-law's sexual abuse in day time and withdraws from normal conjugal relationship with her husband. Her husband's sexual activity appears like physical molestation and violence. She develops schizophrenic disorders and complicates her life. Unable to find a solution to her problem, she goes to the extent of murdering her brother -in -law and then kills herself, leaving her husband to grope in the darkness searching for the cause of her death, and her sister with whom she shares the secret to turn into an introvert and an eccentric person.

In the story "Sharmaji" Anjana through the character Miss.Das, substantiates the modern feelings and opinions about marriage. Miss.Das considers marriage as a private matter and not a social issue to be announced to the public. She confirms through her behaviour that it is not necessary for a woman to make herself distinctly identified as married women. Namita in the story "When Anklets Twinkle" works her way to freedom through language. She

fights by breaking the imposed codes of silence. In the story "The Prophecy" Amrita is rugged and reckless. She violates the rules of the hostel and has premarital sex with her boy friend with no intention to marry him. It is after terminating the unwanted and untimely pregnancy she marries a man chosen by her parents while her friend, who has strong faith in love and marriage, faces terrible shock due to her friends' rash behaviour.

Anjana Appachana's perception of marriage and the sequence of predicaments associated with it continues in the novel Listening Now. In this novel Anjana Appachana has made an attempt to write about ordinary married women belonging to middle class families, tormented by their psyche and their existential thinking. They believe that "looking after husband, children and in-laws as full time job and coping with the cruelty, injustice and hypocrisy of the husband's family beyond endurance"<sup>2</sup> are of great ordeals causing inexplicable woes and sufferings to them. The individuals, highlighted in her novel have immediate awareness of the situation into which they are thrown and this results in the arousal of a sense of meaninglessness, giving them discomfort, anxiety and loneliness in the face of human limitations and a desire to look for meaning by acting upon the world that only damage their life further.

Her portrait of Padma's love story in Listening Now is to describe in detail how Padma is making her existence in this universe a tragic waste. Rukmani, Shanta, Anuradha, and Madhu including the protagonist hold their own concept of

marriage. In common it is noted that all women find marriage, a meaningless and a hopeless institution compelling them to imagine that they are entangled in absurdity. They all experience the existential agony of loneliness, anger and anxiety and fear.

Anjana who is exposed to urban life talks about the changes that drastically happen in the cities affecting the lives of women. With a desire to participate in the course of action that takes shape, city bred women in her novel and short stories, confront the forces that threaten their active involvement but to their dismay, they feel offensively jolted when they discover, they are not equipped with potentiality even to accept normal changes occurring in their domestic lives. They remain in a dilemma not knowing whether to get involved or withdraw from the life and this engenders existential predicaments.

### **5.3 Review of Existentialism**

To prove that Anjana's is undoubtedly an existential writer, and that her novel carries the implications of Sartre's and Camus' existentialism, a broad outline of the philosophy is given in the second chapter.

Existentialism is a philosophic doctrine of beliefs pertaining to absolute freedom of choice. It emphasizes that the universe is absurd based on the phenomena of anxiety and alienation. It is a philosophy of crisis, encompassing a group of attitudes present in philosophical, religious, and artistic thought and expressions that came around the World War II. After the world war, man has

been feeling more uprooted, insecure and alienated from society. Horrifying memory of two World Wars and the resultant wide spread destruction, lead to the evolution of the philosophy called Existentialism.

The roots of existential thought can be traced throughout the history of philosophy and literature. In modern expression, it had its beginning in the writing of the nineteenth century Danish Theologian Soren Kierkegaard. The German Philosopher Martin Heidegger is important in its formulation, and the French novelist -philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Camus have done the most to give its present form and popularity. Existentialism has found art and literature to be unusually effective methods of expression evidenced in the novels of Franz Kafka, Dostoyefski and Camus. In the plays and novels of Sartre, it has found its most persuasive media.

The nucleus of Kierkegaard's philosophy is that reality is individual and its characteristic feature is subjectivity of truth. Keirkegaard directs the humanity to liberate themselves from the illusion of objectivity, a tendency that compel a man to accept the general rules that determine his behaviour and life, and move inward by engaging his mental concentration on individuality. His idea of subjectivity is developed based upon Socrate's dictum 'know thyself'. Karl Jaspers' philosophy emphasizes upon inner action of man: "Existentialism is to catch sight of reality at its origin and to grasp it through the way in which I, in thought, deal with myself – in inner action."<sup>4</sup> Heidegger states man enjoys limited freedom conditioned by fate.

He is the maker of his own life. He is responsible for what he is and what he will be. There are unlimited choice and decisions for him to make his life authentic but he is full of uncertainties and that limits his action and thought. The responsibility of choosing, deciding and acting makes him sad and provide him with a capacity to negate all the limitations. Thereby he finds a threat to his existence.

Almost all the existentialists show a concern with the problem of man, his existence, freedom and choice and responsibility in every field. They identify that a man in the modern age has been dehumanized by being deprived of his freedom. They state existence precedes essence. Man first exists and then he looks at the world, contemplates and acts as an individual. He is a clean slate when he comes into the world and during the course of his life he defines himself. His whole being is involved in choosing the alternative to decide his future and it allows him to have a hold upon his own existence.

Existentialists give much importance to the facts of life like sin, anguish, anxiety, despair, dread, death, choice and freedom. The existentialists strongly believe that by bringing man back to his existence, by restoring his freedom and by giving him chance to choose and decide like a responsible individual the maladies of modern society can be cured.

Sartre encourages man to confront brute reality without recourse to illusion, provided by reason and thereby enter into authentic existence. Sartre, the most famous representative of existentialism, propounds in his philosophy that human

being is the maker of his destiny and is condemned to make his own decision. He daringly asserts, "there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after the thrust forward existence."<sup>5</sup> He holds pessimistic mind-set towards human existence. According to him the presence of human being is irrational and absurd. He distinguishes human beings from other animals based on human freedom. He asserts that thrown into this world, the human being is condemned to be free. He is solely responsible for what he is, his guilt and actions. Choice and freedom are the things that he must find and make.

Sartre believes that mankind defines itself through the act of living. In other words, first a man or woman exists, then the individual endeavours to change his or her essence. He repeatedly says in his literature that life has no meaning and the search for meaning in existentialism is the search for self. It is the doctrine that states that existence takes precedence over essence and holds that man is totally free and responsible for his acts. This responsibility is the source of dread and anguish that encompasses mankind.

Camus, another famous proponent of existential theory uses the term 'absurdity' in tune with Sartre's point of view and lays emphasis on freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts. His philosophy of existentialism is the philosophy of the absurd. For him, "the absurd arises from the

relation between man and the world, between man's rational demands and the world's irrationality."<sup>6</sup>

Camus maintains a humanistic frame of reference; he has confidence in man's ability to fulfill himself; he finds his source of values in human experience. According to him the realization of absurdity of human existence is a necessary condition for accomplishing anything in life. The absurd describes the relation between man and the world. Man is born, struggles, and dies; he is innocent, and yet he suffers; he is tormented; he is ultimately alone. If the man has authentic consciousness of the presence of the absurd within him he has chances of comprehending the despair of universe and accept his life and existence heroically without resorting to the idea of committing suicide. The awareness of the absurd in man is a situation where no great tragedies can play havoc with basic human values. It is about how to take life and how to make it tolerable, even as the purposelessness assails it. Camus expects from his absurdist hero that his actions should be unswerving with his idea and he should be ready to accept the consequences of the truth he sees it. He illustrates his theory on absurdity with reference to the mythological character Sisyphus and four other characters Don Juan, the conqueror, the actor and the creative Artist.

Sisyphus was punished by Gods and was given the task of rolling a large stone to the top of a mountain whereupon the stone would always roll back down. Purposeless labor was to be his eternal punishment. What appeals to Camus with

regard to this mythological story is that the instant when Sisyphus reaches the summit, he watches the stone that he rolls back down the mountainside, and then go downward himself to take up once again his eternal task. During this phase, Camus understands that Sisyphus is conscious of the extent of his torment, of his own misery, and this recognition transforms his destiny into victory.

#### **5.4 Anjana Appachana's Characters and Their Existential Predicaments.**

A detailed analysis of Anjana's major and minor characters in the third and fourth chapters has shown that the ideas that are present in the Sartre's and Camus' philosophy of existentialism are unconsciously captured by Anjana.

Anjana Appachana's sharp surveillance of women's conditions in the modern world intensifies her sensibilities to explore the turbulent territory of women thronged with existential crisis. She finds that even the educated Indian women believe, that their society is compelling them to be orthodox and culture bound and unchanging in their concept of life and their roles as individuals obligated towards family and society. These beliefs in turn brings about internal and external conflicts and moral confusions affecting their psychic conditions. They become existentialists treating the universe absurd and their lives meaningless.

Anjana's protagonist and her other women characters define themselves through the act of living a life of their own. Their problems are self-made and the

sufferings that they undergo are owing to their own psychic conditions. They are very sensitive to any changes occurring in their life and feel appallingly perplexed when they realize that they are thrown into a strange, imperfect and incomplete domestic world. They are agnostic about their existence and consider it as meaningless. They do not make struggle against patriarchal and sexual oppression even though they are conscious of their victimization. They try to adjust to the situations but find difficult to erase the feeling that they are complete strangers with less efficiency to interact freely with others. What results is an intriguing display of their existential predicaments.

Having no clear set goal in their mind, without making use of the choice available to make their life meaningful and not availing the freedom to get redeemed from absurdity, these women continue living in the world. They are self-deceptive and pretentious. They hide their true self.

Almost all the characters, except the protagonist, show very less symptoms of positive progress in their disposition or in their thinking. They hold contemptuous attitude towards life and existence, and they rebel only psychically against the familial and societal forces that hinder them and their pursuit of self identity. They continue their search in the absurd universe to find the meanings and value of them through self-probing, retrospection of the past and alienating experience of the present without realizing that the solutions for all their problems are lying within them.

An analysis of Padma's character proves that the protagonist, Padma is undoubtedly an existential character. She is an alienated individual who does not believe in social principles or give importance to conventional middle class life. She chooses to live a life of her own with no restrictions. Yet she never finds happiness in it for she is conscious of her single status that gives her no scope for transcendence.

Padma experiences distressing psychosomatic trauma that arises due to her nostalgia. Drowning into the ocean of memories and attempting to relive her past only aggravates her problems of survival and lessen her strength. It also divests from her, the maternal instincts and thereby causes predicaments not only to herself but also to her child, Mallika, born out of wedlock:

That was the price you had to pay for loving in this way. You got exposed to yourself, your true self. I'm talking to you so nicely and you're getting with me, Mallika had wept at three. I love you so much and you're shouting at me, Mallika sobbed at three and a half. Only wanted you to give me some love and you're looking at me like that, Mallika wailed at four. And then the next day, she had looked at her mother apprehensively and said, Ma, please don't look at me like that again. Padma had burst out, I'm sorry, my pet. And Mallika, her eyes large, asked, Ma, when you were looking at me like that yesterday, were you turning into a big bad witch?(225)

Mallika witnesses her mother's sufferings every day and that insinuates an awareness of the dysfunctional and imperfect family of hers. She wishes to form a complete home with the presence of her father and mother perfect in playing their respective roles. Later when she meets her father in person, she calls to mind the silent and stressful agony of her mothers' and connects it with her father's irresponsible behaviour. That does not permit her to receive him into her family and there by she widens the chasm between her mother and father never to be healed. Thus she becomes responsible for her mother to continue living as an alienated person though not with the same pangs of loneliness. Padma values her daughter's sentiments and decides to continue living in the society with out Karan again. When she tells him that her future is with her friends, mother, sister and her daughter: “ “ I have built up another life for myself. I have Mallika, Shantacca, Madhu, Anu, amma.” ”(509) we find that she does not free herself from the “dependence syndrome.”<sup>8</sup> However, her strong resolution to reject Karan becomes a signal that shows her movement from stagnation to progress. Padma submits to the process of purgation and resolves to lead a life without any man in her life.

Padma's mother, Rukmani, and her sister, Shanta and her neighbours, Anuradha and Madhu are wives and mothers, fastened to familial and social ties. They remain within these hopeless and void orbits and encounter the absurd in every aspect of being, ranging from monotonous and repetitive activities in life to uncommon and unconventional circumstances.

Rukmani, the oldest of all, uses silence and passivity as tools to realize and cope with the absurdity of the universe and existentialistic conditions prevalent at home and society. She comprehends her role as a wife and her responsibilities in the domesticity packed with absurdity. Though conscious of her estrangement from her husband and children, she does not take efforts to come out of absurdity.

Rukmani, who happens to be suave and elegant as a wife, is incapacitated while performing her role as a mother of three children. The son and daughters disgruntled with her motherly nature, create within her a sense of incompleteness and that corrodes her. Yet she dares not perceptibly make her children see her pain, agony and anxiety. She silently keeps them to herself and continues to survive in this universe.

Shanta is the most sensitive and angry woman of all whom Anjana has depicted. She has a tendency to magnify trivial issues, throw tantrums, act melodramatically and in the climax end with tears in her eyes. Tears signify her vulnerability, impotency to act to the occasion and senseless outburst of her existential anger. With least intention to cool her wrathful temperament or showing any symptoms of dynamic progress, she determines to survive.

For Madhu, nostalgia is the worst existential problem disrupting her happy domestic life. For most of Anjana's characters, memories of their immediate or distant past, give enormous solace and comforts which they never look for in their

in-laws' house. Their mind, conscious of self-isolation and estrangement neither let them to explore joy and happiness in their new home nor help them to adapt to the changes. For Madhu it is just the contrary. She hates to think of the past. Nostalgia is like driving a sword into the wounded soul. It is only an account of her guilt and bitter experiences that can by no means be shared with others with frankness. Padma is at her best to open the heart of Madhu but that causes immense sufferings to her: "The problem in thinking about the Life Before was that it was like recalling someone you had known intimately who had died without warning." (81)

Madhu wishes to retain certain events of the past as secrets. This aspect of hers makes her a dual-personality -one living a "life before" and another living a "life after." (81) She rejects her former roles, thoughts and memories but they do not set her free. Her survival on this earth is through self-deception. She deceives herself when she is forced to confront reality that signifies emptiness. Reality also compels her to contemplate death. Her grotesque perception of death engenders fear psychosis, and the guilt that lies within her.

Anuradha feels extremely difficult to confront the harsh realities of marital life. Marriage brings a great change in her life and that psychically affects her. She feels a stranger in her own house and that complicates her relationship with her husband and in-laws. She is bored with the overabundance of domestic chores and the financial constraints she is burdened with, and that compels her to fuss about

life and existence. She makes meaningless sacrifices and refuses to choose self indulgence and happiness.

Anuradha comprehends the necessity to continue surviving amidst difficulties. She learns to live in her dreams and forget her worries through laughter.

Anjana Appachana has observed that conventionalities are practiced even today. Myths and superstitions, evoked in the past still haunt the mind of the Indian women. Today they enjoy the luxury of comforts that has been given to them by education. Yet some of them prefer to stay at home engaged in doing domestic chores, gossiping with neighbours, feeling bored with life, grudging and complaining about husband and in-laws and remaining at home having no set goals or ambitions.

These women always have an excuse that they are bonded slaves, chained to rigid patriarchal rules. They do not come out of their shells and look for opportunities that shall transform their lives highly meaningful and beneficial. They consider human existence to be painful and purposeless with failures and frustration.

One who reads Anjana's novel understands that if a man or a woman is ignorant of their capacity to love and act and that is the cause of his/her disintegration in an absurd world. A search for meaning in the outer world is futile and unnecessary as meaning lies in his/her own inner world of positive emotion.

Mere consciousness of boredom or absurdity and momentary escape from trauma through dreams, fantasy and illusions do not signify positive growth. It symbolises stagnation that is detrimental to ones personal development. Eradication of hypocrisy practiced in the name of conventionality will open vistas of opportunity for them to enjoy life.

As far as single women are concerned, modernity in thinking can revolutionize their life. There are means to escape from solitary state. Prosperous career, active participation in social activities and good companionship can transform their lives. Instead, if they are inclined to live a life like Padma, brooding over the past, expressing their non conformity and rebellious temperament, it is not going to help them in finding happiness and joy. Except for the single instance when she determines to live without Karan, the rest of Padma's life happens to be just the projection of her senselessness.

Anjana has not given any positive ending to the other five stories. She has not constructed any "replacement model" <sup>9</sup>who can establish an order through defiance or positive changes through conformity. For example in Raji Narasimhan's novel Forever, the central character Shree is psychically tormented by her husband who has strange ways of looking at things. He believes his wife is an adultress because her second toe is larger than the main toe. Unable to restrain his taunts she hits him back, assuming a new role as a courageous woman. She frames on her own accord, a new order to confront any challenges. None of the

characters in Anjana's novel obtain such a daring quality to transcend the existing condition.

In Rama Mehta's novel Inside Haveli, a girl from Mumbai, Geeta is married to a Rajasthani family and the door is locked upon her. Geeta does not walk out of the family or break open the door. She slowly changes everyone in the Haveli through patience and understanding. She changes her father-in-law. She changes her husband and makes the door open for her permanently. It is through conformity she changes her life and not through protest. None of the women characters in Anjana's novel make a transit through conformity. They only learn to accept their difficulties without giving up their existential condition. They passively compromise with the predicaments and conform to the tradition without changing themselves or the people around them.

All this leads us to the clear conclusion that Anjana expects women to understand that there are choices to make even in the society that constrains women in the name of tradition and culture. It is also understood from her novels, that the moment of realization of one's own difficulties must give way for revolution, replacement and reformation for making the existence authentic. During her interview with Pramod K. Nayar, Anjana says, " One has to live inside the mind -- it fills the loneliness, and we solve several of our problems only in our head!"<sup>10</sup> To live in the mind is not through fantasy, dreams or memories but in thinking --thinking that we are privileged sect having attained freedom to choose a

life our own. Anjana is confident that women can transcend their limitations if they have such progressive thoughts.

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<sup>8</sup> Chaman Nahal, "Feminism in English Fiction: Forms and Variations," Feminism and Recent Fiction in English, ed. Susheela Singh.(New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991)16

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