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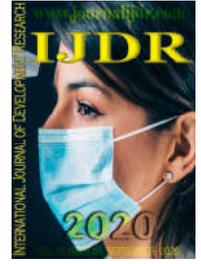
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN AND FAMILY IN ANJANA APPACHANA'S "BAHU"

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ABSTRACT

Anjana Appachana is a famous Indian English Diasporic writer who has a lot of feelings for India which is visible in her writings. She got popularity after writing her first volume of short fiction *Incantations and Other Stories* (1991) and her well known novel *Listening Now* (1998). She has chosen the medium of short story for writing about the Indian woman's experiences, passions and education. Through her stories Anjana portrays the isolation, marginalization and displacement of women in an Indian patriarchal society. Anjana especially focuses on the diasporic sensibility in the lives of women but she is not a feminist. The story "Bahu" is from her first story collection *Incantation and Other Stories* (1991) which portrays self-recognition of the female protagonist in the relationship of marriage. The present paper is an attempt to show the supremacy, suppression and dominance of the male over the female in a patriarchal society. It will also offer a new approach of the female protagonist's life in the ruling ambiance of her family as well as the society.

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INTRODUCTION

Anjana Appachana has become a well-known Indian diasporic woman writer after writing her short story collection *Incantations and Other Stories* (1991) and famous novel *Listening Now* (1998). In her stories she presents the traditional value system and principles of Indian society through her characters. She makes her readers as active contender with liberty so that they could feel about the situations of the characters. But sometimes they feel themselves distant. The characters of her stories solve the societal problems in their own way without going against the rules of the society. The stories of her collection are outstanding, remarkable, admirable, and recognizable. The present story "bahu" is about a girl who is a daughter-in-law in a dominating patriarchal family of India. Anjana does not give any name to her character because she has no significance in her in-laws home. She has a lot of dreams in her life but no one pays attention on it as she is nothing for them. Anjana explains the experiences of a newly married girl who doesn't get any love and liberty in her husband's home. She feels disturbance in the relationship of marriage, so she describes

about her traumatic life in the story. She has dreamt that after marriage she will be very happy but very soon she comprehends that she is completely wrong.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the present research paper, we have selected the available matter on this story and followed the proposed method- as we have elected the main source of this research i.e. the famous short story "Bahu" by Anjana Appachana. We have also chosen some other secondary material, like critical books, journals, internet sources etc. for extra insight about the story. For writing the whole paper, we took help from the 7th edition of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper*.

DISCUSSION

The story "Bahu" portrays the love marriage of Siddharth and the protagonist in a patriarchal society. The daughter-in-law feels depressed for not getting time with her husband and if they get the time to go outside, her in-laws also go with them. She remembers that they surrounded them all the time without

thinking about her feelings. By this Anjana shows the conformist outlook of conventional civilization that has nothing to do with the daughter-in-law. Due to the everyday domestic works she does not get time for anyone so she faces loneliness and detachment with the family members. In the story, through the character of bahu Anjana wants to expose migration, dislodgment, gender biasness and cruelty of the patriarchal society, especially for women. The narrator feels alone in the family with others; even her husband Siddhartha was also very busy in his works. He does not give her time which she always wishes for and she also does not get the love of her in laws. For this very reason she always feels unhappy and remembers her past life with her parents where she was very happy. She thinks that she has not gone to her parents' home from a very long time because of the responsibilities of the family. She imagines:

I thought of the monsoon months at home (my home, my parents' home) sitting out on the veranda with Ma and Pa, watching the rain; ...How long was it since I had gone home? A year. And my parents were just a fifteen-hour journey away by train...It seemed an eternity since I had talked to anyone, or anyone had talked to me, I felt so overwhelmingly homesick. Our parents give us such total, unconditional love. Why do we feel we'll always have it?" (Appachana, 13)

This reveals that she does not get time to meet her parents because of the works of the house. This exposes the meanness and control of the society which thinks that the place of women is limited within the family.

The narrator assumes that not only in the house but outside of the house she has to face the dreadful conditions due to the taunt of a middle aged man by which she becomes so much scared. She had to face pleasant situations many times because of some disgusting men. This shows that in the society women are treated as a plaything without any emotions even if they are married or unmarried. She remarks on this in the following words, "...on all those numerous occasions when these disgusting men fingered me. Either I was scared of what they would do if I retaliated or my reflexes just did not work. They think it's their prerogative. What a sick city this is. There is so much cruelty and frustration under its veneer of sophistication. Why do they do it?...When I go back to the house and cry, people there say, you're too sensitive, other girls survive. Yes they survive, we all survive" (Appachana, 13-14).

The narrator always feels a constant dilemma in her mind regarding her situation. She does not feel any attachment with the house and her in-laws as a result she feels uncomfortable in their house. Her mother-in-law always comments about her ability that she is unable to do her duty in a proper manner. She realizes that her mother-in-law does not like her as she has done love marriage with her son Siddharth. Although her mother-in-law has an antipathy towards her, the bahu does all the works of the house after returning from her job. But she becomes very much upset at the behavior of mother-in-law towards her and as she puts up with all these things only because she is a female. The protagonist becomes very much frustrated at the words of her mother-in-law:

You have no concern for our feelings, you do exactly what you want...We have not stopped you from working. You spend your salary the way you wish. Other working bahus

give their entire salaries to their mothers-in-law...We even allow you to call our son by his name in our presence...We have allowed you all these concessions. And yet you go around with a long face giving people the impression that we are beating you, ill-treating you. (Appachana, 15)

She also remembers the fact of her own mother in this type of situation "that the adjustment is necessary to marriage. There's no point upsetting people when you're living with them" (Appachana, 16).

The speaker undergoes a lot of differentiation not only in the family but in her husband Siddharth's love also who has changed while he was her best friend before marriage. But after marriage she doesn't feel his presence in her life. Every time whenever she faces critical situation she decides to leave her husband but finds herself unable to do so as she has done love marriage. She thinks about her mother's life as she also faced the negligence of her husband throughout her life. Her father never supported her mother in any of the matter but he supported his three daughters very much. She assumes that her father fulfilled all the dreams of her including her sisters. He never speaks against them for their desires. That is why she always expects support from Siddharth in gratifying her feelings. She remembers her marriage in a patriarchal society where dowry is an essential element without which a girl cannot get happiness by her in-laws. At every occasion she always wanted to stop the requirements of Siddharth's parents but her parents stopped her in between, "This is between the parents, they said. You and Siddharth keep out of it. Besides, they added, his parents have not demanded any cash. Then why give all this? I asked. My mother replied they expect it" (Appachana, 18). This shows gender discrimination of the male dominated society where a girl has no wish of her own. She has to adjust according to the norms and laws of the society. In the story Siddharth also suggests his wife not to make her upset at the point of dowry as it is happening for a long time in the society and he could do nothing about it, "He laughed at my fears. Don't be silly, he said. These are traditions one cannot break" (Appachana, 18).

No one in the story thinks about her feelings even Siddharth, yet she has to keep in mind the feelings and moods of the family members and relatives. She used to do all the household chores everyday without taking rest like a typical Indian bahu, therefore, she has no time for her parents, friends and relatives. On the other hand, her mother-in-law criticizes her all the time and her husband Siddharth never disapproves it. The reason behind it was that she used to hurt her in the absence of her son, so he was unaware about her wife's sufferings. He always thinks that her wife is responsible for all this mess instead of her mother. Due to the annoyance of her mother-in-law she also gives up her deep passion for 'sitar' classes. Besides, she also stopped her occasionally day out with her husband so that she could keep happy her mother-in-law. But still her mother-in-law was not satisfied with her and never gives place to her in her heart like her daughter.

Instead of giving love and affection to her daughter-in-law, she was very much concerned for her own daughter and her grandson. Furthermore, her in-laws family always talks about the position of woman in a society that it should be good and safe for woman but they are not concerned about her own daughter-in-law as if she is not a human being. She is so much fed up of all these things that even the news of her pregnancy

doesn't give her happiness. Besides, she also doesn't want to perform her role as a good 'bahu' twenty four hours a day. She feels that due to the motherhood she has to leave her job while she doesn't want so. She says, "...I didn't want the baby. The implications of motherhood filled me with horror. I would be completely trapped. I would have to give up my job to look after the child and in the bargain look after everyone else. I would have no choice but to be a good bahu twenty-four hours a day" (Appachana, 22). On the contrary, her in-laws were very happy and they started to predict that it would be definitely a boy just like Siddharth which shows that the society always prefers a male child over a girl child.

Whenever the wife complains to Siddharth against his mother, he makes her to understand instead of talking to his mother in this regard. He used to say that his mother has become old and in this age she cannot change herself so she will have to adjust according to his mother. Besides, his mother is old-fashioned and very much traditional so she does not have the need to think about her. After getting this unexpected reply from her husband she got miscarriage at that night. The family took her to the hospital but no one could save the child. The doctors recommended her for taking proper rest but she started to work in the house as her mother-in-law constantly teases her. Her mother-in-law does not consider her feeling even after she lost of her child. And her husband Siddharth also holds her responsible for this and says that she will never get a child if she doesn't change her attitude and routine towards her and his family. At that night she feels herself entangled between her past and present life because her life has totally changed after marriage. But this change was not in a positive way so she feels confusion in this relationship. Here Anjana reveals that everyone is responsible for this situation, especially her husband Siddharth because he never gives his wife any comfort and psychological relief. This shows the male chauvinism where he feels himself superior and without any fault. Instead of blaming himself he considers his wife wrong and faulty. She recalls that her husband and his all family members are the same; there is no difference between them, "And Siddharth. What about Siddharth? I must accept it, mustn't I? That he let it be. He chose to let it be. He saw. How could he help but see, he was not blind. Yes, he chose to let it be" (Appachana, 25). She feels dejected and displaced even among all the family members:

He could have stopped it, protected me. Only he could do that. I needed protection. I needed him. I hardly knew the others. He just had to say to them, she's tired, let her rest. She's working, none of you are. She cannot cope. He could have changed it all. Instead he said, you're not spending time with the family... Instead he said, you never smile... He could have said,... But he said, you look a wreck. But mostly he said nothing." (Appachana, 25-26). Sometimes she feels her husband as a stranger due to his changed behavior with her. She remembers her home where she had enough time for everyone and also for her dreams and passions. She can also meet with her friends whenever she wants. She used to go in the music consorts with her parents who go with her because of her interest. But at present everything has changed as she has no freedom, happiness, contentment in her life. She remembers that sometimes she used to become upset at her parents' home but there were lots of friend with her who could console her, "For me, life went on as usual... I had an excellent job, I had my music, I was dependent on no one. Most importantly, I had people who loved me, who in times of

stress, were always there. I recall times when I was unhappy, but never alone" (Appachana, 28). Anjana reflects her loneliness only after her marriage to show the dominance and biasness of the society. The protagonist realizes that today she has no one with her to whom she could share her feelings. More or less she has become a statue without feelings and dreams while in her old days she was happy and had a lot of dreams. But she feels the helplessness of her husband who had already told him that he couldn't do anything about it, only she has to adjust according to it, as:

I could not change it. I could not change the way they thought. Did they really think this way, or was it just more convenient for them to do so?... Did I then also accept it?... Acceptance would mean that I would live this way, always... It cannot go on like this. I have no privacy at all, no independence. It is not my house. We have no time together... And would I also say, no one really cares for me, not even you Siddharth. (Appachana, 29-30) After thinking all this throughout the night she comes out of the dilemma for taking up the right decision. After a long wait she reaches on a decision that she could not live with happiness and freedom in the home of her in-laws. So the best option for her is to leave her husband Siddharth and his family, "What would it be to stay on my own?... Some men would think I was easy game. What would they say at work? We always thought she was such a nice girl. One wouldn't have expected this of her" (Appachana, 31). On reaching to the conclusion the speaker realizes that her husband is only concerned with his parents and society, not for her. After knowing about his wife's decision Siddharth tries to change her decision as leaving everything is not the solution of any problem. Instead of understanding his wife's psychological pain he tells her about her responsibilities while he doesn't see himself. But she feels happiness at her decision and started dreaming that after leaving the house, she will go to her friend's home and make her own home for her. At last, in the story Siddharth assures her for waiting to her but she rejects everything and walks out of the house with confidence.

Conclusion

The ending of the story reveals the psychological suffering of a daughter-in-law who feels secluded even in her own home. She feels lonely even in the presence of her husband as he is unable to understand the desires of her wife and her freedom. This all happens because like any common newly married woman, she also wants to spend some time with her husband Siddharth but she is unable to do it because of her in-laws family. In the family no one accepts her as their daughter and she feels always suppressed because of the narrow-mindedness of her husband's family. So finally she decides to leave the house of her husband and goes to her friend's house to make her own home with her self identity.

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