



"Incantations" and Other Stories

An Important New Young Voice From India

by Anjana Appachana

DESCRIPTION

This first collection of fiction by Anjana Appachana provides stories that are beautifully written, the characters in them carefully and respectfully drawn. All the stories are set in India, but the people in them seem somehow displaced within their own society—a society in transition but a transition that does not come fast enough to help them. Appachana manages to capture the pervasive humor, poignancy, and self-delusion of the lives of the people she observes, but she does so without seeming to pass judgments on them. She focuses on unexpected moments, as if catching her characters off guard, lovingly exposing the fragile surfaces of respectability and convention that are so much a part of every society, but particularly strong in India, with its caste system, gender privileges, and omnipresent bureaucracies.

All life seems to be prescribed; these characters bravely or cautiously confront the rules and regulations or finally give in to them resignedly—any small triumphs they achieve are never clear-cut. One of the most unusual aspects of many of the stories is the way in which they are informed by but never ruled by the author's feminism. She never lectures her readers but lets us see for ourselves: a bride caught in a hopeless marriage where she has given up all rights to any life of her own, a hapless college student who is confined to campus for minor infractions just at the time when she had an appointment for an abortion, a young girl who keeps the dark secret of her sister's rape, a woman executive and a disgruntled male clerk both trapped in the intricate bureaucracy of their business firm and the roles they must play to survive there. By turns warm, gullible, arrogant and bigoted, all of these characters live their lives amid contradictions and double standards, superstitions and impossible dreams. Appachana's vision is unique, her writing superb. Readers will thank her for allowing them to enter territory that is at once distant and exotic but also familiar and recognizable.

AUTHOR/EDITOR BIOGRAPHY

ANJANA APPACHANA went to school in India and graduated from Delhi

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University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. In 1984 she left India to live in the United States, where she graduated from Pennsylvania State University. Her stories have been widely published in journals and magazines in India and the United States. One of the stories in this collection ("Her Mother") won an O'Henry Festival prize in 1989. Anjana Appachana now lives in Tempe, Arizona, and is working on a novel.

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