



# Listening Now

*Anjana Appachana*

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## **Listening Now** Anjana Appachana

Listening Now unfolds through the intensely personal worlds of seven characters. First, there is the child Mallika, brimming with romantic fantasies and bemoaning the lack of passion in the lives of her mother, Padma, and her mother's contemporaries - women whom she nevertheless loves fiercely. Mallika renders her fantasies through a highly wrought imagination, re-creating for the reader the events that came to devastate her childhood. Then, we revisit the events Mallika has described as they are retold from the points of view of Padma and Padma's sister, mother and friends. The story that slowly emerges is not the same as the one Mallika told. For the world of these women is one where secrets grow like fungus, where guilt roots and ripens, where anger burns and smolders. Every one of them carries the burden of secrets that may or may not be known by the others - some secrets obvious, others subtler and more insidious - and that have for them become a way of life. And so they tell their stories, stories by no means as prosaic as the child Mallika believes. Layer after layer of concealing silence is relentlessly peeled off, till, at last, the truth behind the greatest secret of all is laid bare - the story of Padma's love.

## **Listening Now Details**

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Author : Anjana Appachana

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# From Reader Review Listening Now for online ebook

## Pamela Pickering says

2.5 stars. We read this for book club. First, let me say that I was the only person in the club who did not like this book. I didn't care for this book mainly because I thought that the character the story revolved around had the biggest "poor me" syndrome I have encountered in fiction. I know a few unwed mothers who do not have the benefit of having a post graduate education, a house and maid (paid for by the brother-in-law), a loving daughter, and devoted, supportive friends. Yes, the love of her life was unable to marry her when she became pregnant but she had so much to be thankful for. What redeemed the book for me was the fact that she came to some different conclusions about her life near the end of the book and I REALLY enjoyed reading about the Indian culture (a gal in our club is from India and affirmed it was an accurate description). As much as I did not care for this book I have to admit that if your book club would like a lively discussion this is a good book to choose. I should also mention that the first chapter is very scattered and difficult to read (it is written in the voice of a 12 year old). Suffer through it and chapter 2 and beyond will be much better. As to recommending it to a friend? Maybe.

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## Becky says

This book is lyrical, beautiful, and heart-breaking, a book about India, the plight of women, and loss. It is also very long and sometimes spends a little too much time underlining the plight of women and loss, which means it is a tad repetitive. However, I loved the POV shifts and the threads that tie the story together, and I was gob-smacked as each layer of the mystery of Padma's love was revealed--I was often absolutely surprised, and Appachana presented these revelations without cheating.

This is one of those books that will linger in my brain pan for awhile.

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## Ponnuswamy says

I started reading this about a week ago. It's slow going. The story so far introduced me to the characters - a single mom in India bringing up her child. The mother is well educated and makes a fairly good living but is prone to bouts of depression. It's alright, just not gripping at this point. Hope it gets better.

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## J says

(FROM JACKET)"Listening Now" unfolds through the intensely personal worlds of seven characters. First there is the child Mallika, brimming with romantic fantasies and bemoaning the lack of passion in the lives of her mother, Padma, and her mother's contemporaries-women whom she nevertheless loves fiercely. Mallika renders her fantasies through a highly wrought imagination, recreating for the reader the events that came to devastate her childhood.

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Padma's story is deliberatley woven into the apparently ordinary, domestic fabric of all the women's narratives.

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### **Mely says**

Padma is an English professor raising her daughter Mallika alone in Delhi, or "alone"; she has no husband, but she has support from her sister, her estranged mother, and her close-knit set of friends. She is ostensibly a widow, even to her closest friends, who are perfectly and silently sure she is no such thing. (One of them thinks she's a divorcée and the other correctly identifies her as unmarried. They do not discuss this with anyone, including each other.)

The mystery of the love affair that produced Mallika is propels the plot, but the story is much bigger than that. Each section is from a different perspective: Mallika; Padma; Padma's sister, Shanta; Padma's mother, Rukmini; Padma's friends, Anuradha and Madhu; and finally Mallika's long-absent father. Each person focuses on their own life, conveying a cross-section of personalities and situations in a complex network of relationships and feelings. What I love best about this novel is the different voices, the different characters, the sense of the women's histories and daily lives. But I also appreciate it as the best representation of microaggressions I have ever read, the constant, minute, wearying denigrations of women, the threat of violence, and the violence that goes unacknowledged and unrecognized, sometimes even by the victim. This makes the book sound bleak, and it's not. But it's unflinching.

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### **Vidya Viswanathan says**

Favorite Read.....makes you live the lives of three women who are struggling in their own way for their identity!

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### **Poonam says**

Read it some 15 yrs back.....loved it then.

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### **Aravinda says**

The title could have been "Men Ruin Everything." Is there a woman in this novel who has not been

oppressed by a man and by patriarchy in general? Is there a man in this novel who is not a clueless jerk? Only the minor characters, such as the bookshop owner are spared, and if we got to know them better we might find out that they fit the type as well.

In 500 pages of sprawling prose, overwrought, often unconvincing characters and belabored, convoluted narrative, there are some well-written paragraphs and these are the ones that spurred lively discussion in my book club, thanks to which I read the novel. The prejudices and aggressions women face routinely, silently, which men do not notice and which many women also overlook (or perpetrate), are described in crisp detail and as a reader it was vindicating to see someone JUST SAY IT. In describing the incidents, the author highlights the ways in which everyone ignores them and dismisses them, all the more so when someone brings them up.

While various women find ways around the oppressive structures to do things they feel are important, they do not openly challenge the oppression - when they try to do so they are defeated by the seemingly superior logic of the menfolk whose approval they keep seeking, and end up sulking.

The central character Padma, who seems at first to be an exception to this, falls in to the same pattern when jilted by her lover. We are introduced to her by her daughter as "my permanently stricken mother." During her college relationship, she was vocal in challenging the double standards; yet once he abandoned her she suddenly and relentlessly trapped herself into the role of the victim, refusing to build a new life, reliving the past for more than a decade.

By the time we are introduced to her past and to the man whose rejection caused all her agony, there is such a build-up that we are expecting someone truly captivating with some complicated, tragic reason for his rejection. But when we are taken back to her college days, where she meets this man, he is nothing special and doesn't particularly show much love or respect for Padma. Nonetheless, she throws herself at him and he reciprocates. They intend to marry but their plan is derailed by the most utterly conventional reason: his parents have fixed another match. This reader could feel no disappointment about this. The least one can expect while reading a story of a romance is that one cares whether the characters get together or not. But this failed to deliver even that. Perhaps that too was part of its realism.

About that ... amidst all the realism we have a bizarre case of spell-casting. Though helpless to change their lives in so many key respects, two of the women at one point curse three other women. As the curse "works" on all the three women we cannot interpret it as coincidence or even a psychological effect, but simply that these women have the power to curse. All right. If these women have the power to curse, why is it that in all the 500 pages filled with men ruining the lives of women, these women choose to use their magical powers to ruin the lives of three other women?

Amidst the largely lackluster work were some shining narrative moments that make me glad I read the book. I may even read it again. If someone were to condense the novel, a la Readers Digest, it would be a service to the reading public.

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## **K says**

A very ambivalent four stars, but four stars nonetheless for some strong writing and characterization.

"Listening Now" is the story of Padma, a Delhi woman raising her daughter Mallika singlehandedly. Padma's

support system includes her older sister, two devoted neighborhood friends, and some contributions from her estranged mother. The first chapter tells the story from Mallika's perspective -- her sad and stressed-out mother, her fantasies about her absent father, her closeness with the neighborhood women and their daughters, etc.

Although the writing was strong, I had some trouble getting into this because I'm not a fan of child narrators. My interest picked up in the next chapter, where the viewpoint shifted to one of Padma's neighborhood friends and offered a whole new perspective. As subsequent chapters were narrated by other players in Padma's story, the story deepened and became more complex. The book also evoked a strong sense of the cultural context and quiet desperation that characterized these women's lives in a variety of ways.

On the positive side, and the reason for my four stars -- I loved the characterization. Although I'm not usually a fan of changing viewpoints, it was interesting to be inside these many women's heads and see the world, and the story, through individual sets of eyes. I even had the unsettling experience of getting annoyed with a character and suddenly realizing that the character was a lot like me.

Books like these with multiple female characters are often accused of depicting stock "types" rather than characters. I find that to be true of chick lit, but I didn't feel this was the case here. I really felt the women as people, individual human beings, with strengths and weaknesses and different ways of understanding their situations and different approaches to life.

So the negative -- the book was a little too long, and started to fall apart at the end. There were things that seemed kind of confusing about Padma's relationship with Mallika's father, and these issues became more confusing to me toward the end of the book. A shorter, tighter narrative might have helped.

Still, if you're willing to invest the time I thought this was an interesting read and a good story overall.

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### **Vishali says**

The story is set in the fifties and sixties in India and the women in the book are similar to the majority of Indian women found across India who are docile , sacrificing and oppressed in a patriarchal society.

'Listening now' is about Padma who is an unwed single mother and her daughter Mallika. There are some events that happen in Padma's life and they are retold from the points of view of Padma, Padma's sister, mother and friends .Everyone has a secret about Padma and the way they unfold is absolutely captivating .

It's about a beautiful journey of friendship and loyalty.The depiction of female bonding was beautifully rendered in this engrossing narrative.The story had some dramatic and over the top "Bollywood " moments which could have been avoided.

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### **Manjul Bajaj says**

I read this book several years ago and it left so profound an impact on me that I think it should be compulsory reading for all Indian women of my generation and my mother's generation (and perhaps the generations after mine and before hers too.) It expertly lays bare the everyday grief, the quiet oppression, the

below the surface anxieties which go with the territory. And it does so while at the same time revealing layer by layer an absolutely riveting love story. A superbly crafted and extremely moving book.

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### **Sumee says**

This book was very unique in a way. Same story told from the point of view different people. Ending had quite twist and turns, but as the events unfold, more surprising things come up. Beautiful story about friendship and loyalty.

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### **Angela Farr says**

This story made me really think about what it means to be a *daughter, sister, mother, wife, lover ...a woman* .

The story unfolds in India in an indeterminate recent past-- and while this setting made some elements in the daily lives of the characters foreign to me, I was struck overall by the familiarity of issues these women face. There is nothing foreign about sacrifice, submission, a need for respect, a desire to be heard, a wish for real love and validation of one's thoughts and beliefs, a hunger for the freedom to be our genuine selves. As the various characters confront these issues in their assorted ways, I found myself wondering how much of what we each deal with is due to our choice to remain silent and keep secrets? The silence or secrets may stem from our desire to protect those we love, but at what cost-- to them and us? How, too, does our view of the events in our lives, not to mention how we perceive ourselves and those around us, affect what happens to us?

I wouldn't characterize this as an 'easy read', but I appreciate stories that cause me to re-examine myself and how I approach life. Female readers will likely find opportunities to look more closely at themselves and their relationships with those near and dear to them. Men willing to dig deep may find their eyes open to what life is like for the women they know, and might even discover what is really behind both women's silences and their outbursts. An excellent book!

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### **Edith says**

J'ai aimé apprendre sur la culture et la vie des femmes en Inde. L'histoire est tortueuse et j'aurais aimé une fin un peu moins floue. Et l'histoire était un peu mélante vers la fin il faut avouer. Mais quand même, un livre que je recommanderais.

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### **Anamika says**

The first chapter was quite confusing. But soon you are drawn into the lives of the characters. Though the book is written in an earlier time, many of the issues still exist. Some of the parts may seem ant feminist but when one introspects, there is a lot of wisdom. The colloquial English used by Indians seem jarring to grammar Nazis like me in the first few pages. But you soon realise how much authenticity the language adds

to the narrative. I did not like the end where all the ends are deftly tied together with a pink ribbon. Life is not like that mostly. Definitely recommended though.

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