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Emergence of a New Woman in Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*: A journey of Renovation
and Transformation

Abstract

Bharati Mukherjee, born Indian diasporic writer and settled down in America. She is basically third world writer whose main interest is to deal with the problems and issues related with South-Asian particularly India. Like other feminist writers, Anita Desai, Ruth Pravar, Jabvala, she upholds the cause of women problems, but her chief purpose to depict the cross-cultural conflicts faced by women in India, female suffers from double colonization like patriarchy and self-imposed, cross-cultural influences due to globalization and technological advancement. Therefore as a diasporic and feminist writer, in her novel "Miss New India" she has portrayed a character named Anjali Bose, a 19 years old girl having impressive personality. She is the representative of a new woman who is away from the shackles of patriarchy and suppression of being womanhood. She is able to self decision making and protective. It is just the story of one woman' struggles in re-inventing herself into the modern world. The contemporary time is the most suitable time for full-fledged development of marginalized sections of society

such as woman has become at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Indian patriarchal set for a long time, she has been considered as powerless and weak creature. But now changing scenario has changed her roles and emerging new woman has questioned her traditional roles and aspires to go beyond the patriarchal forbidden territory. The present paper analyses the challenges and future prospects for the protagonist Anjali Bose.

Keywords: Colonization, Patriarchal, Globalization, Suppression, Cross-Cultural, Emerging.

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of contemporary writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women's eyes, we can see different world. With their assistance, we can seek to realize potential of human achievement. One of the reasons that women have, in such a large number, taken up their pen is because it has allowed them to create their own world. It has allowed them to set the condition of existence, free from direct inference from men. Similarly, so many women have taken to reading a women's writing because it allows a 'safe place' from which they can explore a wide range of experiences of the world, from which they can identify with a range of characters and a variety of existence. That's why women's writing has occupied such a significant and central place in women's lives. It is also why women's writing can share much the same disparaged status as women in a world dominated by men.

In the contemporary time of liberalization and globalization, women's roles have been changed. They are not only the object of gratification or their roles are confined to the four walls of the home. They have come forward in every aspect of human life. Some of them have broken the conservative patriarchal set of womanhood and crossed the limits of family restrictions to

make their career bright and vibrant. They have also challenged the patriarchal marriage system to fulfill their desires and gains. They have not only participated in school games but made their presence in the fast growing society also. Such a sketch is portrayed in *Miss New India* (2011) by Bharati Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee, an established diasporic women writer has made her corpus in immigrant sensibility and cross-cultural crisis not only in American or Canadian context but also in India. All her previous novels or stories deal with the women protagonists in assimilation of alien cultures in alien lands. But *Miss New India* is purely set within India but the western cultural effects have played a vital role in developing the themes. It creates a new orientation of woman identity dealing with the conservative thoughts of patriarchal system and modern western lifestyle cultural effects in growing India. It deals with various issues such as rape, international terrorism, false charges of murder, police brutality, arranged marriage system, teenage runaway, divorce life, gay life in India, prostitution, art of theft, suicide, role of outsourcing of Indian economy, the art of photography, homelessness, telecom centre (call centre life), immigrating in India and assimilation in Indian culture. These issues have been dealt with at the cost of destruction of many lives in the novel.

The novel is centered on Anjali Bose, the protagonist, a nineteen years old, tall, sportive and studying girl having good American English accent. Anjali is valorized by taking bold and unexpected steps to explore her life with new axes by running away from her hometown, Gauripur to Bangalore without knowing anybody, except having a sum of money and two addresses given by her teacher-cum friend, Mr. Peter Champion. In the prologue of the novel, Mukherjee talks about immigrant concept in reverse direction that is some of rich western like the Aussies, the Canadians, the Germans, the Finns but specially the Americans — the one who stayed for months, then years lived like poor villagers; these rich westerns sometimes resorted to

begging and got sick and other died from beggars' diseases. Among them one in hundred or thousand becomes reborn with no interest in returning home. They settle down in towns and villages, learn languages, and live Indian lives. They took modest job with foundation and charities. They took to the country side to . . . collect music of tales, art and crafts. Some of them married local girls and some of them remain celibate, like Peter Champion, the American expat, Anjali's teacher-cum-friend.

They connect their lives with India, and make their lives purposeful. They assimilated with real Indian lives. *Miss New India* revolves around Anjali Bose, a B.Com student having her overtly features: The conventional form of Indian femininity projects itself through long lashed, kohl-rimmed-startled black eyes. Modest women know to glance upward from slightly bowed head. Anjali did not take in the world with saucer-eyed passivity.

Miss New India is the story of transformation of Anjali Bose. She tries to detach herself from old traditional codes of society and search for a new space and a new identity for herself. She discards the man chosen for her marriage by her father and crosses the traditional threshold of and restrictions on Indian women. When Anjali arrives in Bangalore, she feels that she has come to an alien India. She finds a clear impact of Western culture almost everywhere:

The women didn't seem jealous or possessive. Most of them were plump and the men already getting stout like her father. Their friendship didn't seem like lead-ins to marriage. The young people in Bangalore had no parents, no relative to appease. No gossip or scandal could promise them. They had come from all over India to get away from gossip. (*MNS* 92)

Neither *Miss New India* is a transnational story nor is it a tale of an immigrant, having crossed the boundaries of her country to settle into a new country. This novel can be seen as an

example of internal diaspora. Anjali faces the same kind of difficulties and problems to settle down in Bangalore. She left Gauripur with determination and hoping never to return back. In Bangalore, she tries to forget her past painful memories and looks forward to a new life and identity in Bangalore: “She had nothing to lose, no good name to tarnish. No one knew her parents and her parents had no idea where she was” (*Miss New India* 81). She aspired to make a future in the new trend of call centre, but she soon realized that she does not belong to this digital virtual world of future. She struggles to carve a niche for her in this new India but cannot snap her past roots. At the end of the novel, she stops behaving like a fake American and chooses her Indianness over Americanness. The novel ends with Anjali’s visit to Gauripur, which left her completely satisfied and happy.

Bharati Mukherjee’s latest novel is *Miss New India*. Its heroine Anjali Bose befits a modern feminist. The novel captures the stirring agitation of a juvenile Indian, woman’s pursuit for emancipation. Mukherjee maneuvers her compelling protagonist’s efforts against treachery, violence, and corruption. She is recognized for her potency and resolution. Anjali is incessantly in exploration of a new identity. She longs to be in dominion of her own destiny. She struggles to amend herself in a New World. In an exclusive interview, Bharati Mukherjee talks about her latest work, *Miss New India*. She says that the novel is a venture to explore globalization and its psychosomatic and poignant effects on India, in general, and; Bangalore, in particular. On the constructive side, Mukherjee says, the globalised financial system has made the empowerment of women viable. She says:

I am interested in the psychological, emotional, personal consequences of globalization. In the novel, much of the violence and corruption (forms) the

underbelly of globalization . . . But I don't want to minimize the sense of empowerment. The collateral gain is the women. (*Global India Newswire*)

All through the novel Anjali dawdles between diverse adaptations of her name. Hence she flees the limits of small-town Bihar, one of India's most backward states, for the promise of Bangalore, one of the country's fastest burgeoning cities. There she works at a call centre, falls in love, meets sparkling, youthful entrepreneurs and conjectures at the riches being made all around her. She comes across her share of misfortune — police brutality, real estate sharks — but finally prospers in reinventing herself. *Miss New India* recounts a coming-of-age story of Anjali who like juvenile women in every age and culture anticipates finding enchantment, romance, and a career.

Women too accepted the patriarchal society's dictates because of their fiscal dependence on men that is on fathers, husbands, and sons in various phases, of their lives. In other words, lack of earning competence crippled them and made them endure in calm if they were not blessed with fine life. This condition led to never-ending crimes against women and containment of their fundamental privileges. But Anjali engraved her own customs to make her monetarily sovereign. Like the thousands of other young people who congregate to this new metropolitan, Anjali longs for a career to make money to uphold her and achieve her thoughts. She thinks that, "A job is the key to happiness, she calculated. A job brings respect and power. Money brings transformation. Stagnation creates doubt and tyranny. Money transforms a girl from Gauripur into a Woman of Bangalore" (110). As Poornima states in her review that "Anjali is an emblem of rebellion against self-satisfaction" (Poornima 1). Mukherjee adds, "She wants personal happiness, not class or caste or tribal privilege" (*Miss New India* 78). Mukherjee records Angie's wide-eyed discovery of the new India; her movement from Gauripur to Bangalore is almost like

a shift to a new country. Every accent, every attitude seems incredibly foreign to the girl from small-town Bihar. Yet she progressively makes her approach and locates her place in the world with the aid of some very big hearted friends.

Miss New India is a novel full of contrasts as India itself; the contrast between the old and the new, between obligation to family and fidelity to self, between the comfort of what are familiar and the tow of rejuvenation. It highlights the themes of rearticulating oneself without altering the psyche and how to clinch the future without losing the past. The protagonist, Anjali, leaves her life in a miniature, pastoral village for the prospects and freedoms of Bangalore, India's call centre capital. Anjali never leaves India, but the hardship she faces, the ruthless reality of parting home, and the complexities of trying to familiarize oneself in a sometimes hostile, weird milieu, are all experiences that emulate those of immigrants around the world.

Anjali first moves into the Raj-era mansion owned by Minnie Bagehot. Within these walls, she discovers in Alice-like wonder and innocence the atrocities of the Raj, relaxed ethics personified by the other young women, lodging there, Islamic terrorism and contemporary fashion. Her abrupt exposures to all these make her feel alienated.

After sexual violence frees Anjali from responsibility and fantasy, she is described as a constant, heedless wanting; wanting too much; wanting more of especially happiness (259). Satisfaction for her is a career as a call-centre. Mukherjee depicts the protocols and ethics of the nouveaux assets of Bangalore through the life of Anjali in Bangalore: "I have seen more and learned more in Bangalore than I have from twenty years in Gauripur. Here I feel I can do anything. I feel I can change my life if that's what I want" (166) says the vitalized Anjali. The central character, Anjali, is resolute to live her life on her own terms and learn new things along

the way by conquering her goals, learning the principles of connections/ contacts and the experience of altering one's individuality leading to new paths.

The theme of reinventing oneself, of limiting who one is in order to achieve something, is the important theme in *Miss New India*. When Anjali lands in Bangalore, life in small town Gauripur seems worlds away. Unaccompanied, carrying only a suitcase and an address for a boarding house, Anjali, or Angie, as she has decided to call herself, finds that life in Bangalore is not quite what she anticipated. Her first meetings with young call center workers her own age, leave her beleaguered and panic-stricken. These feelings soon turn to determination however, and Angie begins to comprehend that to carry on, she will have to overlook ethics that she formerly held cherished. In order to “make it”, Angie will need to re-invent herself in ways she never dreamed of call centre workers are expected to absolutely forget who they are and where they come from in order to oblige customers and comfort customers. They gain knowledge of American games, television shows, and pop culture, and all the while, they are slowly losing themselves. Angie concurs to this veracity and apprehends that it is the key to her continued existence. Anjali points out that:

To a Gauripur runaway like her, Bangalore was an emotional and moral tsunami; it washed away old beliefs and traditions, the comforting ones together with the crippling', and if you survived, you knew you and the spunk and the grit to rebuild. (165)

She fabricates an alter-ego, an American version of herself whom she calls ‘Angie.’ Her struggle with her own individuality is densely played out through these words: “Anjali felt more like an Angie” (191). Anjali, like modern-day India frequently does, opposes her hometown and sees its potentials. With her new maturity, she has learned that she does not have to repudiate the

past while looking forward to the optimism of a redemptive prospect: “Angie the bold one, the initiator, was beyond blame, or shame. Anjali just watched, and let things happen” (226). Mukherjee endeavors to capture the zeitgeist of a young, modernizing country through Anjali’s expedition. It delineates a melting point where old customs liquefy like icebergs against the shores of modernity.

Later, as a booming business woman, Anjali returns to her home village to address Peter Champion’s students. Peter tells them Anjali had ‘the spark’. He says: Thanks to her: and millions like her, India was on fire. . . . She didn’t bring the fire all by herself, but she was a collateral beneficiary. He said she was just one in a billion but each of us had it in us to be another one in a billion . . . If we were ready to listen and to act, she had lessons to teach us. (326)

Miss New India highlights the changes brought about by globalization in India, illustrating the colossal evacuation of a determined and impudent young Indian woman into Bangalore, India’s Silicon Valley. Mukherjee depicts twenty-first-century India in a digital age when American customs and ethics are introduced and altered by a young Indian woman who ends up staying in the country. Roots and routes are negotiated in the novel in unique ways, leading to the augment of new kinds of worldwide cultural identities. Performing American identity in her place of work and switching between Indian and American identities in her everyday life, in *Miss New India* exemplifies a lodging of “Americanness” and a conversion of “Indianness” in modern-day India through the validation of hybridity. She shows young Indian’s refusal of the customary purity of cultural individuality preferred by her parents’ generation in favour of a modern and flourishing “Indo-Western” metropolitan subjectivity. Full of initiative and aspiration, she is on the watch out for new prospects in modern India.

Thus *Miss New India* ends in a sanguine note. Mukherjee portrays Anjali as a depiction of a burgeoning universal fiscal power as she is a composite of pragmatist disposition. In a way, Anjali is the sovereign of “light and angles” (306). She reallocates her position from that of the faithful daughter of conservative Bengali parents, intended for arranged marriage and a life of subservience to the other. Anjie free-spirited juvenile woman independence to high spirits, romance, and affluence. It is about a young girl who wants to work, who thinks that once she has that job with a stable income, she has made it, she has escaped. She has escaped from her predetermined regional rural small town life, escaped from the marriage that her parents are frantically trying to organize for her, escaped from the autocracy of a future mother-in-law, familial chore, and the prospect to utilize her astuteness and dazzling personality. Through Anjali’s personal thoughts, the flamboyant editorials of her suitor, Mr. G.G, and the heart wrenching letter of her early mentor, Peter, readers come to realize not just the magnetism of Bangalore and the culture of the budding global elite, we also expand imaginative insight into the unusual challenges and complexities of becoming an empowered and autonomous young woman in India today. Moreover, without drifting into sentimentalism or romance, Mukherjee has her readers rooting for Anjali Bose— defining and living life on her own terms.

Anjali Bose is the envoy of new India because she crosses the customary barricades and she boldly comes out of wedlock and family into a new one which she deems as dazzling, happy and a sense of pride. Thus Anjali Bose’s story is an optimistic account of a young woman’s self-empowerment. She pursues magnificence and triumph as well as individual bliss. In the process, she generates the myth of an “Indian Dream” into reality.

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