

Redefining Feminism through Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*

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Abstract

Miss New India by Bharati Mukherjee is an attention-grabbing and engrossing work as far as engagement with diverse images of women is concerned. Her writings offer a full range of experience of the emerging Indian woman who though rooted in customs, is strongly dedicated to re-defining her role and her connection to various associations of the society in the light of modern thought and consciousness. One can find in her works identification and admiration of the prospective of 'self-contained individuality of woman' with all its anguish, conflicts and challenges. Bharati Mukherjee's writings re-define the feminism and reject to yield before the conservative dominance of conventional society and suppression.

Keywords: Feminism, Identity, Resistance, Journey

Paper

Dissimilar to the images of Indian woman as silent victims dominated by patriarchal and global norms of subjugation and repression, images of women in Bharati Mukherji's writings have undergone a categorical makeover from interpretations of self-sacrificing women towards self asserting and self-defining women within the broader structure of social sphere and various identities. It is refreshing to see in her novels a realistic portrayal of issues central to woman's status and identity as well as a continuous yearning on the part of women protagonists for widening the horizons of their existence and action from domestic to public environment. Be it the journey for self-discovery or challenging the traditional and stereotypical characters and disparities or the urge to go above domestic limits, the women presented in the recent female writings seem to enquire all that limits or restricts their dreams, desires and aspirations, though their attempts do not always meet with success and sometimes even land them up in utter chaos and anarchy. "Many Indian women novelists have explored

female subjectivity in order to establish an identity of their own as well as to raise the voice of women in Indian traditional society” (Bijalwan, 151). It is the image of an emerging and struggling woman with no clearly defined path or destiny and hence the usual share of pain, anguish, sorrow, conflicts and the humility to accept failures. But over and above everything, the most significant aspect in these contemporary novels is that rather than depicting any homogenous, confining or essential image of a new woman, they try to project her numerous roles, aspirations and images, conscious of her rights and responsibilities, sometimes falling victim to the gleam of modern life, at other times effectively breaking through the traditional barriers and yet other times marching ahead with all her limitations to an unknown path of realizing her full potential as an independent human being.

As the title proposes, *Miss New India* is a type of fable for the new homeland. This tale is full of enchantments and Mukherjee’s inscription is noteworthy, yet rhythmical. Her narrative of Anjali’s cultural displacement is noticeable by an eager emotional insight. In the beginning she faces the outlook of a monotonous conservative life in remote place named Gauripur, in north-eastern Bihar. The second daughter of a Bengali railway clerk of lowly earnings, she is the cherished student of a peculiar American uprooted teacher. The journey of Anjali Bose, who leaves her family and their expectations behind to get big city prospects in Bangalore, the Silicon Valley of India. Vigorous, stylish, and fluent in English, she is the girl who comes from a small town of India to work in call centre, answering customer service calls outsourced from America. Anjali Bose, a young woman attracted by the bright lights of Bangalore. The main occurrence is rape by the man her parents have selected as her husband, but through the support of an American teacher, Peter Champion, she is dreaming of a luminous prospect in India’s IT capital. Anjali Bose represents a girl of modern India of elevated vigour and superior ambitions. Anjali Bose, who comes from a conservative Bengali remote place town. Anjali, living at home, is on track for an arranged marriage, but when her father backs the marital entry of a gruesome man who rapes her on their first outing, she runs away to Bangalore.

Bharati Mukherjee conveys us to the fast development happening in India as a consequence of the modern outsourcing happening led by some of the major Western corporations. The title refers to the new female personification aspired to by the major character Anjali Bose the contemporary woman functioning as one of India’s growing number of call-centre agents. This modern woman has deserted the conventional way and chooses the modern life style. Mukherjee’s description is influential when she portrays Anjali’s journey from an untrained

girl to a matured and aware person as she struggles between her past and her new changed identity as “Angie.” Mukherjee represents the absurdity and humiliations in the high valued association of arranged marriages of boys with girls in Indian society. Even after the disaster of his elder daughter’s arranged marriage to a rascal, Anjali’s father is resolute to choose a boy for her as well:

Her parents could live with another failed marriage. They could tolerate her misery so long as they felt they’d done their duty. But they would not survive the shame of a second daughter’s act of defiance and insubordination. (Mukherjee, p. 45)

A submissive daughter, Anjali knows her father’s longing to persuade a valuable companion, though a trendy young photographer warns her: “India’s on fire. If you get married now, you’ll miss what’s happening and you’ll be sorry” (Mukherjee, p.35). At their private encounter, the man her father decides as son-in-law proves to be a sexual hunter. Anjali escapes from Gauripur to search for her fate in reviving Bangalore. But her escaping from her home town is also a rebellious act. She does not surrender before the atrocities of male dominating society and through her this step Mukherjee redefines the feminism. Anjali is born into a traditional lower-middle-class family; she lives in a remote place town with only an arranged marriage on the possibility. But her aspiration, attraction, and confidence in language do not go ignored by her enigmatic and well-known expat instructor Peter Champion. And to make her winner he introduces her to powerful people who can facilitate her along the way. Anjali herself, inspiring her desire to take liability of her own fate. She writes a letter to her parent in which she states that:

I will not marry any boy selected by anyone but myself, especially not this one. If this leads to a barren life, so be it. As you should plainly see, the boy you selected has dishonoured me. He should be sent straightaway to jail. (Mukherjee, p. 64)

Mukherjee redefines feminism through the character of Anjali Bose, a rebellious, who flees an arranged marriage in search of her own future in the loud metropolitan area in the part of its digital age. With help from her American teacher, Anjali finds shelter in the remains of the once grand Bagehot House, a boarding house which holds the memories of a colonized India and the scratches Britain once imposed on the nation. The girls who rent rooms there are the new women of India, proficient and everlastingly confident. Angie was her insubordinate, external looking character, desiring more from the world than an arranged marriage. In her home town her qualities which she possesses as a strong woman were looked down upon by

the people and her parents. According to them she is not a conventional figure of woman in Indian society:

On the minus side, she lacked accomplishment such as singing, dancing and sewing, traditionally expected of bridal candidates. She was also stubborn, headstrong and impulsive, and by middle-class Gauripur standard, inappropriately outgoing. (Mukherjee, p. 17)

Subsequently she leaves to Bangalore, one of the most promising cities, and shortly falls in with a daring and ambitious mass of young folks, who have become skilled at how to sound American so as to get employment in call centres, where they rapidly earn money. *Miss New India* is about that tussle between Anjali and Angie, each persona never relatively liberated of the other. Sadly, Anjali's promised call centre job does not live up to its expectations, and her search for a suitable partner never weakens, even when her own career begins to crush. This novel is also about the nasty nevertheless positive change that can come from immigration, except it's from Gauripur to Bangalore. Anjali was the devoted daughter of a railway employee. And it is in this ultra-modern city where she suddenly enlightened from the limitations of status, caste, and gender, is accomplished to face her past and experiences yet again herself. Undoubtedly, the enticing pull of life in the New India does not come devoid of a gloomy part. Anjali Bose, from a less than thriving town in central India, rejects the prospects of an arranged marriage after suffering rape and humiliation by a suitor. Her step to leave her home town is appreciable which shows a rejection to a male dominating and patriarchal society and which also redefine feminism in today's perspective. Though after coming to Bangalore she analyses that "not every man was as befuddled as Nirmal Sen, or a bully like her father, or a rapist like Subodh Mitra, or a lying cheat like Sonali's ex-husband, or an exploiter like Sonali's current boss, or brutish John like the truck drivers of Nizambagh" (Mukherjee, p. 96). In the boarding house to which Champion has sent her, she encounters a landlady who is unable to live beyond her own imaginarily constructed past and thus cannot help Anjali begin to cope with the present. Despite some setbacks in her first weeks in the capital of expectation, she collects the guts to register in a private call centre training school, also recommended by her expatriate teacher in Gauripur.

Mukherjee's preference to reiterate conventional view is mainly apparent in her portrayal of Bangalore, a city that in the fashionable imagination, both conjugal and alien, has come to symbolize a bit of metaphor for contemporary India. Mukherjee's Bangalore is an all exceptionally remarkable depiction. Anjali is introduced to the copious lifestyle and newly

constructed grand buildings in Bangalore where she comes across “ground-floor boutiques, middle floors for offices, and top five floors, luxury condos. For the condo owners there were two indoor swimming pools, a spa, spectacular roof garden, and of course full time maid service” (Mukherjee, p. 97). It is a noisy, the innovative hub of the world and excited confident young Indians who speak in embellished American pronunciation and have replaced the sobriety of previous generation with the enjoyment of untailored sex, alcohol and disco. Anjali Bose, who escapes the constrictions of small-town Bihar, one of India’s most backward states, for the promise of Bangalore, one of the India’s fastest emergent cities. She has a desire to become independent and she comes to know that “A job brings respect and power. Money brings transformation. Stagnation creates doubt and tyranny. Money transforms a girl from Gauripur into a woman from Bangalore” (Mukherjee, p. 108). There she works at a call centre, falls in love, meets dynamic young entrepreneurs and miracles at the destiny being made all around her. She comes across her share of suffering through police cruelty, real estate sharks although ultimately do well in reinventing herself. The novel develops as Mukherjee transfers her consideration from social interpretation to the details of Anjali understandings in Bangalore. She exhibits a different feminist approach through her character. Mukherjee’s “novels express the impulses of Indians, who, in their search for a better life, face the problems of adaptation and survival” (Devi, 244-245). Anjali constantly imagines that she is living in a dreamy life of spectacular. It is a bewildering novel. On the one hand, it amusingly flies through India's post-liberalisation age group, fascinated by foreign brands, uncertain towards the swift success, leaving the "values" and "ethics". On the other, India has changed so rapidly in the past few decades that *Miss New India* is already Miss Old India. Anjali Bose, the gorgeous Bengal-born, but Bihar-bred girl from Gauripur is nearly destroyed by the Bangalore bonanza of call centres. Her eventual appalling conclusion along with a short time in jail after all insists her to gather her muddled belief and scattered sombreness, taking back onto her high heels, ready to conquer the world once more. In her other novel *Desirable Daughters* “through the lives of Tara Lata and her two sisters, author Bharati Mukherjee competently portrays the themes of changing identity, western feminism versus Indian tradition and self-discovery ”(Bijalwan, 3). In earlier novel *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee has written warmly regarding the migrant experience, and “the three sisters from Calcutta are no longer strictly bound by this primitive culture, for they find themselves in the midst of liberal America, where the scope of their freedom and expression is at its furthest from realities in India” (Bijalwan, 4). Mukherjee is evidently on familiar

opinion when she shows Anjali's effort to familiarize her in a world different from the one she has known earlier. Anjali's trouble, slowly uncovered as the novel develops, opposes the certainty and display of the imaginary setting she dwells in. Anjali, like contemporary India often does, revisits her home town and sees its possibilities. With her new maturity she has learned that she does not have to reject the past while looking forward to the hope of a redemptive future. There is a redemptive, and more serious, thread that courses through *Miss New India*. The novel is a sarcastic review of India's contemporary culture, both traditional and modern. It examines the uncertainties and insecurities that many young Indian mature men and women feel when their traditions are unsuccessful to provide path.

Contemporary Indian English writings by women attempt to engage and grapple with living realities of women of various strata of society and endeavour to project life in all its richness and complexities. It is basically a representation of contemporary woman who declines to be a beneficial object in the society and prefers instead to declare her individuality by challenging the defined social and family norms and structures, be it marriage, wifehood, motherhood or the larger questions related to her liberty, freedom and recognition of her social and intellectual searches. Modern woman depicted in Mukherjee's writings seem to be a creation of the rapid transformation and redefines feminism in the society. She represents diverse struggles of women characters in her writings and tries to show the possibility of autonomy and empowerment as well as new consciousness arising out of modern learning, knowledge and understanding.

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