

RE – INVENTING ONESELF IS THE MAIN THEME IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE’S NOVEL MISS NEW INDIA – A DISCUSSION

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee (1940) has been a dominant writer of Indian origin settled in Canada and then in the United States of America. Mukherjee, in her writings, paid importance to the condition of the Indian woman immigrants. Her stories are about psychological transformation, especially among women immigrant. Miss New India is a novel full of contrasts as India itself; the contrast between the old and the new, between dedication to family and dedication to self, between the comfort of what's familiar and the pull of modernization. The protagonist Anjali, who prepared to call herself by the more modern Angie, was torn between a life described by traditional rituals and a life of independence in the gleaming metropolis of Bangalore. Angie begins to realize that to survive, she has to forget ideals that she once held dear. In order to, "make it", Angie will need to re-invent herself in ways she never dreamed of. This theme of re-inventing oneself is a main theme in this novel.

Keywords: Immigrants, Reinventing, Rediscovering, Modernization

Bharati Mukherjee (1940) has been a dominant writer of Indian origin settled in Canada and then in the United States of America. Her works deal with Indians coming to terms with America and its melting – pot culture, including her Canadian experience with an ongoing quest from expatriation to immigration. In her works, she is concerned with the life of South-Asian immigrants / expatriates in the United States of America. She is also concerned with the problems of multiculturalism and foreignness of self. Mukherjee, in her writings, paid importance to the condition of the Indian woman immigrants in America. Her stories are about psychological transformation, especially among women immigrants from Asia. Her attitude to immigration, multiculturalism and the foreignness of self has changed over years. She had felt herself an exile or an expatriate and then she felt that America's melting-pot approach to imagination was better than Canada's stance on multi-culturalism. She is obsessed by the experience of immigration, multiculturalism and the feeling of foreignness of self in her works.

Mukherjee's novels exhibit her characters' feeling of nostalgia - longing to belong to the lost home/world. They unravel the disillusionment of immigrants and expatriates. They show the female psyche as a fragmented one. In fact, women's psyche is caught between assimilation and negation. In the same manner, belonging to one's own native culture, while living in an alien land, is presented as something to be totally shunned. Mukherjee's novels also include cultural hybridity, and the third space of enunciation, which are really the hall-marks of the post-colonial condition of existence and human perception. Mukherjee has authored works such as **The Tiger's Daughter** (1971), **Wife** (1975), **Days and Nights in Calcutta** (1977), **Darkness** (1985), **The Middleman and Other Stories** (1988), **Jasmine** (1989), **The Holder of the World** (1993), **Leave it To Me** (1997), **Desirable Daughters** (2002), **The Tree Bride** (2004), and **Miss New India** (2012).

Miss New India is a novel full of contrasts as India itself; the contrast between the old and the new, between dedication to family and dedication to self, between the comfort of what's familiar and the pull of modernization. The protagonist of this novel is Anjali Bose, a nineteen year old girl. She belonged to the traditional middle class family. She was more attractive in her looks and she had a passion to live a modern life. But that was not possible in Gauripur. Her father was a Railway clerk. She had a sister named Sonali, who lived with her daughter at Patna. She got divorced from her husband. Anjali was a business student at college. She had an aim of working in a Call Centre. But it was not possible for her because her father did not allow her. Her parents were typically obsessed with the search- including internet sites to find her a good husband from similar Kayastha caste with Bengali background, despite not having much of a dowry to offer a suitor.

On the contrary, Anjali did not like to live as an ordinary woman. She wished to achieve her goal. Anjali knew well about the traditional and ritual beliefs of her parents. So, she was unable to do anything. Her parent's traditional thoughts, beliefs and rituals disturbed Anjali. She lived with them while opposing their beliefs. Her parents never allowed her to talk with anybody in the Market place. They did not allow her to visit the Pink Mahal. Even they opposed her visiting the teacher's house for learning Advanced English Course. Anjali did not want to depend on her father. She wanted to earn her own living. Her parents made marriage arrangements for Anjali. She agreed to meet an attractive man with whom her family allowed her to spend six hours in his Red car after finding him to be more suitable for Anjali. He raped her in the car. That night while her parents were sleeping she left for Bangalore wearing Jeans and T-shirt. She feared while travelling alone. She left her parents a note saying that she left them to take her place in the world. Then her teacher helped her to settle in a boarding house where she could do service calls for American learning about T. V shows, and sport items.

Anjali was certainly ready to take off. With the help of an expatriate teacher, she headed to Hindi speaking Bangalore. Her new home, a call centre metropolis, had a breed of young men and women whose English she could scarcely understand. She settled into a rented space in the sprawling, decaying home of an elderly British matron

and found her new life as Angie not Anjali, more and more enlightening and attractive. All of her call centre friends worked hard to sound American. She was made thoroughly American

In this novel, Mukherjee seems to support conventional wisdom which is evident in her descriptions of Bangalore, a city, and in the popular imagination of domestic and foreign. Mukherjee's Bangalore is an all-too-familiar agriculture. It is "roaring capitalistic", "new centre of the universe", "a go-for-brake", "rule bending", "forget-about- yesterday", and lets "blow-it -all" place populated by tech-savvy, "hyper confident", young Indians who speak in exaggerated American accents and have replaced the abstemiousness of an earlier generation with the titillations of casual sex, alcohol and Night clubs.

Bangalore is a bustling, Paris -sized city in Southern India, but "Bangalore" is a concept for Indians, especially young Indian women from lesser cities, with middling education and few prospects. Bangalore and other out sourcing centres, like Gurgagaon outside of New Delhi, are magnet promises of a new life. Bangalore is "the dust west" for a vast Indian middle class that will never see the real thing. It means money, self- expression, experimentation and freedom. Bangalore exerts its own fascination for American and European multinational corporations and for out sourced phone centres and bank office operations. From those modest platforms; Bangalore, with its exploitation of Indian higher education and entire skill, is moving into the truly profitable realm of front office medical, architectural and legal relationships.

Bangalore is an example for bridge culture. It created a low-tech jobs and those jobs created expectations and satellite jobs with somewhat higher standards. The young people, who filled those vacancies, found themselves making more money than their parents. They bought cars, mopeds, and houses for their families. They led advantages. In Bangalore, something new is always on the horizon and all experience counts for something - success and failure, the swirling underworld, the throb of night clubs and the lure of everything. Sex, drugs, liquor and may be even love, a mate chosen not by parents are possible in Bangalore. It makes a new kind of maturity and friends from every community and region of India-casual affairs, a hasty marriage, divorce, job loss, and a habit of saying 'yes' to anything new. This is Bangalore. Such a city has been chosen by Anjali. Anjali, who prepared to call herself by the more modern Angie, was torn between a life described by traditional rituals and a life of independence in the gleaming metropolis of Bangalore. One future offers the possibility of a handsome husband who can be found in online matchmaking services; the other promises a place where young women like herself work as Call Centre service agents and sip coffee at Starbucks. In fact, Mukherjee portrays a country where old customs co-exist and often clash with new social mores in a country where Anjali fumbles more from the limitations of caste and class even as her father remains trapped by old structures and superstitions.

When Anjali arrives in Bangalore, life in small town Gauripur seems to give way to her. Alone, carrying only a suitcase and an address for a boarding house, Anjali, or Angie, as she's decided to call herself, finds that life in

Bangalore is not what she has expected. Her first meetings with young call-centre workers of her own age, leaves her overwhelmed and intimidated. These feelings soon turn to determination, however, and Angie begins to realize that to survive, she has to forget ideals that she once held dear. In order to, “make it”, Angie will need to re-invent herself in ways she never dreamed of. This theme of re-inventing oneself is a main theme in **India**. Call-centre workers are expected to completely forget who they are and where they come from in order to please clients and reassure customers. They learn about American sports, television shows, and pop-culture, and all the while, they are slowly losing themselves and assuming a totally foreign self. Angie accepts this reality and realizes that it is the key to her survival. Anjali later feels that she had seen more and learned more in Bangalore than twenty years of her life at Gauripur. In Bangalore, she feels that she can do anything. She felt she was able to change her life and it was all that she wanted. She also declares herself as a newly emboldened Anjali. But her experience at Bangalore totally turns her to be a huge roller coaster ride where she is seduced into the freedom and modernity of the city. The trickery of co-residents pushes her into troubled waters and gloomy side of independent life does not remain alien to her.

Even though Anjali is often described as a magnetic girl with smile and a seductive quality that draws strangers to her rescue, she is strangely a passive character who stumbles onto society, along with the changing events and influential people. She doesn't change her life by her own attempts whereas she felt that living with her parents will make her married according to their wishes and she would lose the goal and couldn't get a good future. But in the modern life, Anjali lost her own family and she was also away from the traditional principles. She ran away from Gauripur due to the misbehaviour of the bridegroom. But in the modern life, she accepted sex to be casual.

Later, when she turns a new life, emerging to be a modern girl, she accepts GG to have intercourse with her. Tradition here gets into combat with modernity. The rules and beliefs regarded with tradition have been overtaken by modernity. Anjali being traditional has undergone physical abuse and later when she accepts modernity she develops the mental maturity of handling the problems in a better way. She has left the traditional ways of life and finally it is not she who adopted modernity but it is modernity which adapted Anjali to lead a life of her own with a kind of satisfaction.

But, like many young girls longing for the freedom enjoyed by their American counterparts, Anjali is too trusting of her new friends. She is pulled into a web of conspiracy and violence. She is unprepared to handle them. In the novel, Mukherjee, who interviewed numerous call centre workers, elegantly entwines the notions of modern India with all its technological promises and possibilities and with the traditional embedded cultural customs surrounding women in India. Loss of home, the immigrant experience, and the hardships of women are constant themes that run through this novel. Usually, in her novels, all her characters leave India to live in other countries and suffer from the separation from their homeland, from what's familiar, but in **India**, Mukherjee explores these themes, but with a twist; the protagonist, Anjali Bose, leaves her life in a small, rural village for the opportunities and freedoms of

Bangalore, India's call-center capital. Anjali never leaves India, but the hardships she faces, the grim realities of leaving "home", and the difficulties of trying to orient oneself in a sometimes hostile, foreign environment, are all experiences that mirror those of immigrants around the world in her earlier novels. The themes of reinventing / rediscovering oneself without losing oneself, how to grasp the future without losing the past, can be taken as metaphors for the issues facing modern-day India.

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