

## ANJALI BOSE IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *Miss New India*:

### A WOMAN EMPOWERED IN REALITY



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#### **Abstract**

*Women novelists have been hauling the baton of Indian writing in English and they undeniably inhabit a formidable space in the modern-day literary space. Fiction by women writers in India has been a main segment in Indian writing in English since independence. With an eye to understanding the particular challenges that women who have been subject to cruelty and prejudice face in relating their experiences, it reflects on the pioneering ways in which fiction by Bharati Mukherjee seizes with the effects of women being exploited. Bharati Mukherjee surveys the gendered distress of women who have been subjected to violence and abuse.*

*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. 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 opulence and triumph as*



well as individual bliss. In the process, she generates the myth of an “Indian Dream” into reality.

**Key words:** agitation –alienation - emancipation – globalization – empowerment – reinventing.

Women novelists have been hauling the baton of Indian writing in English and they undeniably inhabit a formidable space in the modern-day literary space. Fiction by women writers in India has been a main segment in Indian writing in English since independence. In *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*, Rita Fleski points out that we find in the fiction written by women a discovery of the female self . . . recovery of what has always been present but suppressed” (143).

With an eye to understanding the particular challenges that women who have been subject to cruelty and prejudice face in relating their experiences, it reflects on the pioneering ways in which fiction by Bharati Mukherjee seizes with the effects of women being exploited. Bharati Mukherjee surveys the gendered distress of women who have been subjected to violence and abuse. Rita Fleski remarks, “The problems which women share as women can serve an important critical function in making women more aware of and less amenable to their own exploitation” (169). True to Fleski’s outlook Mukherjee records her individual experience in her novels with an authorial detachment. Her fiction serves as an outline to comprehend the maneuverings of tyranny that women are subjected to in a patriarchal set up. She does not portray her protagonists principally as sufferers. Instead, she shows these women forging novel tactics to surmount ordeal and oppression, and their silencing and devastating effects.

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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 effervescent, 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.

Anjali is the beaming star for a modern India of towering dynamism and eminent objectives. She simply desires to trace her position in the world. Anjali's prime aspiration was to progress to a more modernized place and have a life where she can make all the decision and execute the things she wanted to accomplish. Earlier she faces the prospect of a numbingly conventional life in Gauripur, in northeastern Bihar. Anjali Bose is much more at ease being Angie. Being young and talented she finds her aspirations outsized – no match for the small town – Gauripur, Bihar – that she is brought up in.



Mukherjee writes about Anjali, her female protagonist: “From the backwater of Gauripur, she’d somehow caught the fever; she was part of the bold new India, an equal to anywhere, a land poised for takeoff” (23). That dynamics is given wings by Peter Champion, the American expat teacher in town, her mentor. Anjali is his adored student, the one with impending potential, and Peter counsels her to not just reconcile for a married life as her parents would have her do, but instead move to Bangalore and put her ability to use in the modern economy.

Anjali’s ambition and fluency in language are perceived by her Peter Champion. He sees a sparkle in Anjali that needs to be esteemed and he encourages her. Champion swirls her craving to take charge of her own destiny and tells her that, “Bangalore is the place for a young woman like you” (16). It is here, in the midst of the shiny wonders of present India that this vivacious tale of renovation actually initiates.

Anjali, living at home, is on track for an arranged marriage. She gets an associate degree in Commerce and anticipates the companion her father gets for her can be elegant, gorgeous, and kind. But her father backs the marital candidacy of a ghastly man who maltreats her roughly, rapes her, and tries to reduce her sense of worth as an Indian woman on their first outing. This results in an emotional catastrophe in Anjali.

The history of Indian women is “history of silence”. They were hushed when essential human privileges were deprived to them; when they were treated as beasts of burden by the family and the society and when aggression against them continued frenziedly. Inhibition of their rights and forbearance of felony continued since they belonged to inferior sex. Women also were taught that “patience” is women’s asset. They were taught to regulate to any condition for the sake of family welfare and society’s outlook. But Anjali streamlines her future by taking an unyielding resolution that she has an individual right to pursue her own happiness. She leaves her parents a note saying “I am ready to take my place in the world” (66) and she runs away to contemporary, hectic, twenty-first century Bangalore as per her mentor, Champion’s guidance to reposition her stars. It is there



where she recoups her sexuality and true self. Thus Anjali begins the toil of carving her path in the world.

Bangalore is invigorating and petrifying to Anjali, but she is soon enamored with the twenty first century mode of life. In Bangalore she experiences life in a very different perspective. Suddenly liberated from the clutches of convention she gets involved with many things. She gets so trapped up with her new-fangled life that she does not look forward to the tribulations that smack her. She learns numerous imperative life lessons all through her expedition.

Women too accepted the patriarchal society's dictates because of their fiscal dependence on men i.e., on fathers, husbands, and sons in various phases of their life. 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 from Bangalore" (110). As Poornima states in her review "India Smiling: Bharati Mukherjee on *Miss New India*", "Anjali is an emblem of rebellion against self-satisfaction" (1). Mukherjee adds, "She wants personal happiness, not class or caste or tribal privilege" (1). 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 bighearted 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-center 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.

Alienation vexes Anjali wherever she goes, not knowing who she is, what she must do, or how she must respond in doubtful and convoluted circumstances. Mukherjee names her 'Anjali', which means hands folded in a sign of reception. Her name fits her as she goes from moment to moment in her bamboozling juvenile life, vigilantly welcoming ethnically baffling twists and turns.

After sexual violence frees Anjali from responsibility and fantasy, she is described as a woman "of constant, heedless wanting; wanting too much; wanting more of everything, especially happiness (259)". Satisfaction for her is a career as a call-centre employee. 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 had 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 home town 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* sheds light on 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 favor 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 – Angie – a free-spirited juvenile woman, at 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. GG, 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 opulence and triumph as well as individual bliss. In the process, she generates the myth of an "Indian Dream" into reality.

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