

Miss New India: East-West Dichotomy

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Abstract:

Bharati Mukherjee is a phenomenal writer in English and she treats Indian characters, especially female characters in Western atmosphere seeking the liberation from claustrophobic native socio-cultural atmosphere in almost all her novels. So western country, especially America as liberating power, is attempted to be justified in one after another novels but in *Miss New India* she has added another dimension, irrespective to earlier ones, where her protagonist doesn't need to cross the black sea in pursuit of the privilege what the western women do relish rather she attempts to create the similar atmosphere inside the native country i.e. in India itself, stamped and permeated with everything which America can offer with caressing patronage. In *Miss New India* she takes into account one of the Indian metropolitan city, Bangalore, thriving with all the potential that western country, especially America can offer in IT sector with its booming consumerist market to accommodate the aspirations of Indian youths, especially girls from orthodox Indian set up, and so to explore the facets of emancipation with their moderate education in Americanized Bangalore but against the professed mission Anjali on numerous occasions discover to be caught into conflicting situations in colonized Bangalore and instead of being assimilated and Americanized to justify the obsession; under the passionate and promising patronage of Mr. Peter Champion. This paper intends to explore the different situations where East – West stand culturally juxtaposed and despite the helping western hands offered, Anjali doesn't feel assimilated rather outraged on so many occasions, justifying the established belief regarding the differences between the east and the west and socio –economic, political and cultural superiority of occident over orient.

Keywords: emancipation, obsession, conflict, cultural assimilation, denigration, East-West dichotomy, occident, orient, Ambivalence.

Bharati Mukherjee is a versatile genius and a very prolific writer. Definitely the identity of Indian women, especially women from Calcutta or for that reason some other parts of India, is pivotal in her writings. Almost all scholars and researchers have categorically analyzed her novels in terms of feminine perspective but this paper is a humble attempt to locate the east – west dichotomy to which her characters are subject to, especially Anjali in the case of *Miss New India*, like several other of her protagonists. This novel is also replete with the obsession with which she has begun her career i.e. social and cultural superiority of Western country, especially America in pursuit of total emancipation of Indian women. Even *Miss New India* also replicates her obsession but in different way that cannot obliterate the fact that betterment of Indian women is subject to Western benevolence. *Miss New India* is thematic extension of the *Trilogy* i.e. *Desirable Daughter*, *Tree Bride* and *Miss new India* pertaining to re-orientalization of the orient. The dichotomous East and West are juxtaposed to assert the western superiority over Eastern; and for that reason Indian; and its dependence on western masters and their benevolence regarding cultural and social liberation of Indian women. This paper intends to explore the dichotomous relationship between east and west on the one hand and on the other and shaping hand of west and for that reason America in emancipation of Indian women.

Miss New India is thematic extension of Bharati Mukherjee's earlier novels but in different way in *Finding the Centre* (VS Naipaul), in her earlier novels two binary opposite cultures East and West are juxtaposed and the betterment of Indian women is subject to American culture. In her earlier novels protagonists migrate to America to seek liberal cultural and social set up where status of women is better against the claustrophobic and chauvinistic patriarchal set in India. But in *Miss New India* the protagonist Anjali Bose doesn't need to cross the national boundary to be blessed by America, as western shaping cultural situation is available in India itself, she has only

to travel from north to south of India at the suggestion of her western benefactor Mr. Peter Champion, her American teacher, who alone succeeds in discovering her potential and suggests, “*You have the spark, don’t crash and burn. India is starting to wake up. India is a giant still in its bed, but beginning to stir. It’s too late for me, but India is catching fire.* (MNI, p.10). In this novel narrative constructed revolves around American citizen if not around America like her earlier other novels, as liberating force that can’t be ensured without western motivation, guidance, support and management. If we take the backdrop and setting of this novel into account it is different from *Desirable Daughter* and *Tree Bride*, irrespective to Jasmine, as the protagonist both belong to moderate middle class and both are social victim in orthodox Indian social set up but are pole apart in other perspectives and situations of the novel. Despite all the efforts put into the novel *Jasmine*, she is unable to justify the natural assimilation in American socio-cultural set up which becomes evident in her desperate answer to frequently asked question, “*I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness*” (*Jasmine*, p.240) In her earlier novels the most saleable quality is their docility and acceptance of familial responsibility without claiming equality and hierarchy unlike their western counterpart but in this novel the most saleable quality is physical beauty and American accent, the foremost quality of emancipation and transformation from orthodox traditional life to independent liberal identity, and for that reason to claim the identity as do American women have. The yearning of traditional family in India for suitable match making is juxtaposed to craving of young Indian women for their independent identity on the basis of the qualities that they have, so the family efforts becomes antagonistic towards the aspirations of the offspring, appropriately reflected in the novel.

The narrative that novelist has created to support her hypothesis revolves around male chauvinism and subjugation of feminine gender initially centers on Sonali, though partially, in depicting the pathetic condition of women in Indian socio-cultural setup. Sonali is elder sister of Anjali and it is because of mismatched marriage and its breakdown that compels her to live a life of desolation as a divorcee with her small baby on account of her arranged marriage as picked up by the author to focus the pathetic condition of Indian women. Now the question arises whether every arranged marriage results in divorce and desolation and compels to think whether Indian social system of marriage is failure and outdated and the author very curtly debunks the arranged marriage system, especially on account of its being handpicked by patriarchy. In every country there are several socio- cultural practices to make life and living comfortable, and it is just a matter of chance that sometimes it turns favorable whereas sometimes goes against the expectations and this situation is applicable to everywhere irrespective of country as there can be no guarantee that the marriages made by self choice will always be fruitful and successful. And since the author has developed obsession and prejudice regarding Indian socio-cultural practices so looks at retrogressively, and derogatively looks down at Indian notion about marriage, *“It is not question of happiness, your or ours. It’s about our name, our family reputation”* (MNI, P.11) this notion about marriage presented by the author is partially true, truly family reputation is focal but not at the cost of conjugal happiness. The family reputation is highlighted whereas conjugal happiness central to marriage, whether orthodox, semi orthodox or so called liberal social set up is concerned, has been obliterated to attain the thesis. No socio- cultural ritual will exist longer if comfort and happiness is denied, the practice will prove to be irrelevant and outdated, it is only on account of spatial reasons that something non- native i.e. foreign and for that reason American is considered liberating and civilizing. After the failure of Sonali which is

referred to support against the orthodoxy, author switches over to Anjali, an average student enrolled in Vasco Digamma College as student of B.Com program under the patronizing and caressing impact of English professor Mr. Peter Champion, loves to be called Angie a step ahead towards liberation and identity quest under shaping and civilizing influence of Mr. Champion who promotes with words, *“You will carry on, ... you have the spark, don’t crash and burn. India is starting to wake up. India is giant still in bed, but beginning to stir. It’s too late for me, but India is catching fire.”* (MNI, P.4)

Now Anjali with her brand value i.e. her physical attractiveness and American accent is depicted having setback in pursuit of matchmaking effort at family level, compelled to face denigration at the hand of Mr. Subodh Mitra, though she has high demand in marriage market, unfolds the social status that women have in orthodox social setup. During their first meeting to know one another before the settlement of marriage Anjali is presented ill treated facing atrocity, denigration, humiliation, and even physical violence and sexual abuse at the hand of her fiancé, something outrageous and incomprehensible as well as unbelievable in twentieth first century human civilization anywhere, East or West, enforces strategic imperative in justifying the hypothesis of Indian orthodoxy where women are second rate and so to necessitate the caressing and comforting mentoring of fascinated occident i.e. America to take forward the narrative. Definitely, the author might have inspected, enquired and researched this obnoxious social situation depicted in the narrative but normally such situations are discovered only after the marriage takes place where emancipation becomes irremediable. So the narrative is devised to move slowly away from socio - cultural setup of taboos to social control to free zone where one can think, plan and do as per her own sweet will. This is the nature of nostalgia with the author, even more typical than V S Naipaul who has justified reason behind belittling and debunking his

past as third generation Indian but Bharati Mukherjee, a 20th and 21st century Indian, depicts everything negative for women in Indian social setup just to create the disparity with western women which might have been appropriate in her case as Europe was her fascination but its generalization is unjustified especially at the cost of someone's cultural inheritance. Now Anjali after her break up is compelled to see the dream thrust upon that her creator still dreams long after adopting American citizenship and it is in the mentorship of Mr. Peter Champion she begins a marathonic search for culturally temperate zone in Americanized Bangalore to seek a life of freedom from male chauvinism and life of excitements that she longs for, *"I told you at graduation you had to leave this place before you got trapped in rotten marriage. I'm telling you again, let that happen and you are as good as dead... I have dreams for you. You get married to some boy from here, and the dream dies. You shall never see the world."* (MNI, P.17-18)

In 21st century human beings do not have time and space to dream for themselves but it is magnanimity of Mr. Champion that besides his have space for someone else also and the dream that he has shown her is about enlarging the horizon out of her native place, Gouripur, marriage to a local boy will spoil her life and will restrict her interaction and enjoyment of bigger place like Bangalore with bigger dream that European women do relish but Mr. Champion doesn't notice that *'bigger the place greater will be disorder'* as well will be on route in this dire search. Against such backdrop of emancipation and enjoyment Anjali follows the path that her American teacher has dreamt for her and she embarks to search the myriad opportunities and boundless joy that southern Indian city, Bangalore, developing on the model of America and American entrepreneurs and visionaries have provided. A girl with moderate education from traditional Gouripur, Bihar leaving behind all the set back and traumas decides to ride on the dream horse shown and so to immigrate Bangalore to seek a job that Europe modeled Bangalore might offer

for emancipation from orthodox, claustrophobic and male centric middle class society though she doesn't have the technical expertise to fulfill the demand of Techno Valley, the merits that lies with her are her physical look, attractive personality endowed with fluent English with American accent. Anjali now embarks to Bangalore at suggestion of her mentor Professor Peter Champion with his some connection with British Raj and custodian of empirical legacy, the professed civilizer and intended to modernize Orient, will be caressed and nurtured with western assistance to cross the periphery of marginality with the help of western viz-a-viz American Bangalore but her first interaction and impression in new India; where young girls have been located smoking ,is discouraging and demotivating, but her creator is intent to modernize and liberate her with colonial legacy and nurturing at the cost of native denigration as expressed here:

This is a historically important residence... In this very room, on these very plates, a very long time ago, His Majesty Edward VII dined, as well as Innumerable minor royalty... We have retinue of over one hundred, including drivers, gardeners, cooks, butlers, khidmudgars, chaprasis, bearers, durwans and jamadars...The garage in the back housed twenty motor cars, I am referring to Bentleys and Duesenbergs, not the rattletraps Indian people drive. (MNI, pp. 116-117)

The word rattletrap, a derogatory word is used to address the natives by arrogant colonial mindset where Anjali is advised to seek solace from Indian pathetic condition created by patriarchy; one has reason enough to consider what kind of assimilation in heavenly cultural world offered by America she is going to attain. Here Minnie's Raj- era mansion is '*a storage barn, more a warehouse for unusable possessions than an active residence*'(MNI, P.121) to Anjali and here we find East and West standing fundamentally against one another as a challenge

before her for natural assimilation from native identity of distinction and differentiation, a narrative of power dynamics doesn't allow the East to meet the West and the horrible historical facts shiver's her off from regional identity and she succeeds in assuming the national identity as Indian as soon as she enters in the forbidden zone :

She was about to sneak out of all the ball room when a row of photographs along the far wall drew her attention ... As she drew closer, she began to feel sick. Sari-clad bodies lay strewn along a riverbank. The faces were young, no older than she was. Bodies of Sikhs... lay stacked by firewood, and walking among the bodies were uniformed British soldiers, grinning broadly...Another painting featured a distant row of hanged men, Sikhs with their hair chopped off, hanging by their turbans, silhouetted against the setting sun. Bagehot House was a museum of horrors. (MNI, P.137)

On account of colonial brutality and horror of colonialism Anjali leaving behind her ethnic Bengali identity assumes Indian national identity and is disgusted over barbarity and inhuman behavior of colonizers that her ancestors have witnessed and suffered , as an instance where old Indian heritage stands ambivalent to the new India of Bangalore shaped by the West i.e. America , a conflicting situation that repels her smooth fascinated search for identity suggested and designed by her American mentor. Even the novelist herself has retorted in an interview regarding Anjali's perception about impact of colonialism on natives, a vision that contradicts the suggestion rendered by her mentor to Americanize her and in that situation she, *“comes to an emotional understanding of how her parent's generation has been damaged by colonial injustice and to a stern reassessment of Minnie's British Raj nostalgia. Minnie is no longer foolish and colonial debris; to Anjali, Minnie now becomes an embodiment of colonial evil.”*(Globalization

and change, P. 185) Now her sneaking into Bagehot house and its horrible realities sickens her to such an extent that she succeeds in unveiling the cruel and crooked intention and its impact on natives of the Raj is genuinely expressed in the following excerpt:

Bagehot House was considered a respectable address, a first stop for young working girls. Bagehot House carried its own recommendation. Minnie was admired for running a no-nonsense boarding house that was good training for the corporate world, but there was nothing admirable about it. Anjali, who'd looked on the British period as a long comic opera, felt a sudden connection to all the Indian dead, and the indignities they suffered. She saw her parents still cowering and still recovering from the scars of colonialism and the dazzling new Bangalore as a city of total amnesia. (MNI, P.138-139)

Anjali in her frantic search for identity offered by Bagehot House, a custodian of colonial power and glamour, is not very smooth and unobtrusive for she faces culturally perturbed on so many occasions and situations where she feels antagonized as explored internally by the author during her journey of Indian subcontinent where she fails to understand the dialect spoken on the one hand and on the other their way of dressing, conversing, working, behaving and in turn whole cultural set up of the new place that stands ambivalent to her inheritance and she feels mesmerized on some occasions and antagonized on some other evidently expressed as follows:

From the side walk (Anjali) could make an outdoor coffee bar with patio umbrellas on an elevated plaza between two skyscrapers. A gaggle of voices floated down to her, tinkly voices of hyperconfident breakfasters, chattering in American English. Finally, a language with familiar cadences! She climbed the

stairs to the plaza and found herself in a crowded coffee shop. Not just any coffee shop, not another Alps Palace (in Gauripur) with mold blooming on the water – stained walls: this was Barista. Most of the small round tables were occupied by large groups of noisy patrons her age, dressed, like her, in jeans and T- shirts. Many of the girls were smoking, gesturing wildly, and giggling like schoolgirls.

(MNI, P. 86-8)

In Bangalore problems of Anjali increase manifold after terrorist assail, for the suspect of the strike is a woman, who is suspected to be a Bagehot. Anjali struggles to certify her identity at the time of police interrogation. Police believe she is lying and she unable establish her identity firmly, as her credential is suspect, an embarrassing situation is appears as she feels acute identity crisis and broods over the precarious nature of her existence in Bangalore, a big and fast growing American modeled modern city, a city of her fascination at the suggestion of her mentor, renders her alien, though later she succeeds with the help of some of her friends in claiming her fluid identity as new woman of new India, at the cost of mental agony and turmoil , accompanied with severe conflict on numerous counts; on account of old and new values, the inherited old and the aspired new that she intends to imbibe. The attitude of the custodian of the empire about natives is evidently expressed by Maxie , husband of Minnie, a remark which is not only insulting but at the same time humiliating as well that it can easily be deduced to ponder over the kind of identity native Indians aspire in Westernized Bangalore and how much is it convincing to attain the natural assimilation in American culture :

Bangalore was a splendid place, so long as the natives kept their filthy hands off it. Bangalore's weather, a year- round seventy five degrees, with no bloody monsoon and no mosquitoes, was the clincher. No finer place in the

empire, they agreed, not that an empire in the expansive sense of the word still existed. (MNI, P.122)

In almost all the novels of Bharati Mukherjee, her characters are placed in conflicting situation and are compelled to undergo complex experiences on account of different cultural practices , inherited and intended to acquire, their usual cultural practices stands contrary to dominant culture of the place, the culture of the ruler, compelling them to feel alienated on account of cultural seepage, that puts them in perplexing situation where they feel awe struck in search of freedom that they did not have in their native place, that situation also appears in the case of Anjali also even in her own country, Americanized Bangalore, “ *She understood, in a way: Bangalore excited her, but it left her depressed. All the money made people go slightly crazy*” (MNI, P.97) And this depression is justified with reason that her inherited values does not easily permit to become the part of the modern Bangalore, though it is one of the city of her own country under the techno-babble impact of western civilization to that much extent that it is to her native traditional surrounding and practices. Even she stoops to adapt the sexual flexibility to attain her fascination of cultural assimilation in Americanized Bangalore; she freely enjoys the opportunity available; that also couldn't liberate her from inherited cultural shackle that is why she keeps on brooding after the act is over, an act completely psychological in nature to explore her after the sexual rapport, an act that stands contrary to native culture; typically Indian in nature expressed in the following excerpt:

I am a woman now, she said to herself. I am quite a woman. I'm hot, according to Tookie. Secretive and oh so mysterious, according to Husseina Sherbet-cool, Sherbet refreshing, if I am reading Mr.G G correctly. (MNI, P.227)

The mystery about Husseina remains unfurled and that also pushes Anjali into mire of agony and pain. There is conflict between Angie and Anjali when she was arrested for killing Minnie, a situation where old and new India meet and interact are put into a conflicting situation, that places Anjali in a delirious condition, a state completely bizarre and hallucinating, “ It was not happening to her. This was not happening to me, it is happening to Angie. I am a ghost.” (MNI, P.256) Now the Angie of new India instead of being metamorphosed faces a very tough condition in life where she differentiates between Anjali and herself and the pain and the suffering that comes in her life is projected as the pain and suffering of Angie not of Anjali , as a situation not only delirious but also utmost precarious and confusing where she fails to remain either Anjali or Angie, rather tries to escape the sufferings inflicted and that broadens the gap not only between the two names of the same person but also between the two contrary cultures; The East and the West, Indian and American represented by Anjali and Angie. The mental condition of Anjali is explored and reflected in her pursuit of freedom and restriction free set up provided by Bangalore under patronage of America, a journey to be assimilated is traumatic as she is shocked and awe trucked in her journey of natural assimilation suggested by American mentor. She is placed into shocking and embarrassing situation after being released from jail against the charge of murder of Minnie, she passes through strange state of transformation and she tries to come out of the confliction situation, where her past and present interact and put her in a pathetic condition as she attempts to forget her past to restart , an utmost startling and harrowing situation, and she resents, one has reason enough to delve into the mental turmoil, unrest and helplessness as she tries to wipe out her memory to restart, “ *She had no memories. Her memories were only starting now. Her life was starting now.*”(MNI, p.322)

Anjali's journey of transformation to Angie in Bangalore, a city modeled on European parameters, especially American, a society culturally saturated with Americanism where women are supposed to be better placed, exerting equal rights and privileges that do men have, a perception that can be evolved on account of inferiority complex that colonizers have strategically fostered, offered by a town of dream and aspiration for Indian women, as cherished and nourished by creator to enable her characters to leap out of claustrophobic and logocentric socio-cultural set up to relish all that western women are enjoying, unmindful of the fact that the East can only serve the West, it cannot meet the West, a dichotomy framed by the West for its eternal superiority. But the journey undertaken by Anjali at the suggestion of American mentor is full of travail and trammel to be Americanized, rather on so many occasions discovers to be put into antagonistic and ambivalent situations to cope with what American culture offers for inherited culture doesn't permit to be bypassed, places into a precarious situation 'to be or not to be', a state of eternal indecision and restlessness, as result professed mission of assimilation also deters and character keeps on fluctuating in between the two, not allowed to relinquish one for another, a state of emotional and psychological turmoil. However, she definitely succeeds in providing the opportunity where her character dares to think out of the box in spite of her meager background but only on the ground of mimicry of American accent, an instance of accepting the subordination, an endless labyrinth of locating identity at the cost of harmony and peace of mind, compels her to find offense in different situations, justifies the observation of Mary Louis Pratt, "Social spaces where desperate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relation of domination and subordination." (Imperial Eyes, P.4) Here an attempt is made to profess the meeting of two cultures; stronger and weaker results only in domination and subordination, pertinently applicable in the case of the East and the West and their meeting

results only in mimicry and acceptance of subordination, there is no possibility for East to be merged into the West, it is simply a mirage like condition to become one with but it never stands true and remains hallucination of unanswered riddle. One has reason enough to deduce that the East will have peace and harmony only with East with viable social and cultural change to accept the co-existence in case otherwise such journey will be subject to numerous jeopardy, subordination and humiliation. Anjali towards the end of the novel has rightly differentiated the challenges of her parents with that of her own, an instance representative of situations to everyone aspiring like her, recorded as follows:

My new beginning is here. But different from baba's and ma's generation. They had to fight the British, their big fight is to establish an independent India and create a non aligned world. There was a struggle... religion. They were lucky, their fight was not easy, but simpler and clearer than mine ... poverty terrified baba. But I am terrified, tempted and corrupted by the infusion of vast sums of new capital. (MNI, P.304)

In *Miss New India* 'Indian cage and American sky' have their own challenges; and the challenges offered by American Bangalore is bitter than the challenges of patriarchal India. One remains native in once native country but becomes foreigner in another and despite all the efforts the gap between native and foreigner remains unabridged on account of economic and cultural status and so one has to pass through a different stages of denigration and humiliation despite their attempt to compromise and adjust for one's cultural values are stirred and antagonized, ignorantly unmindful of the fact that the East can only serve the West, it cannot merge into the West, a dichotomy that has been formed in the outset as a powerful strategy to make the natives feel eternally inferior to their colonial, European masters and the opportunity of freedom, liberal

set up offered by the Europe is very costly, as it is available at the cost of cultural oppression and mental turmoil and peace of mind. Indian young women might perceive it differently as it is alluring and enticing but if they think on their own what do they achieve at what cost, definitely they will develop the clarity regarding the huge loss, shattered concept of family life, sincere conjugal love and overall the peace of mind as they keep on discovering in conflicting situations, at least to their lifetime, and sometimes it is extended to next generation to feel astray to main stream of their socio-cultural set up.

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