

Dilemma Of Tradition And Modernity In Bharati Mukherjee's

Miss New India

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Abstract

Indian Novel in English today has definitely carved a prominent place for itself in the literary world. Indian women novelists in English like Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Gita Hariharan and Shobha De portray the complex, dual and ambivalent identity of women engendered by a clash of tradition and modernity in their women characters. Their works no longer represent woman as a mute sufferer and upholder of traditional values but an individual who fights hard to free herself from the cages of conservative society. Bharati Mukherjee has also been one of such writers among them and she makes an earnest effort to understand the inner dimension of the female characters. In *Miss New India*, the protagonist is projected to shuffle between tradition and modern world. Not only as an epiphenomenon of modern life but also as an interpretation of idealistic woman, the novel tries to spotlight the remarkable situation of India. Confidant and determined Anjali Bose are prepared to undergo the process of racial change. Suffering from a public shame due to Sonali's divorce, Anjali's father initiates her groom hunt. This makes Anjali move from Gauripur. She considers marriage as a lifetime imprisonment that controls her and limits her beyond imagination. Her recognition may get buried in the family saga. She wants to be different from her contemporaries in ways of education and job. She gathers strength to endure the agony and pain of leaving her parents and working in an outer place. Anjali endures to assess herself, out of the circle of marriage. This paper scrutinizes the dilemma of Tradition and Modernity in Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*.

Keywords: ambivalent, dilemma, interpretation, prominent, traumatic.

Indian authors have influenced an entire generation with their writing. The Indian women, on the one hand, are forced by their tradition to curb their freedom, suppress their desires and needs and sublimate their selves in the martyrdom of self-denial and self-effacement and, on the other hand, have strong urge to raise their voice against oppression and subordination. This generates agonizing conflicts in their interior landscape.

Mukherjee has depicted her protagonists as docile and submissive females who struggle hard to find solutions for their problems without dominating their male counterparts. Her characters keep experimenting with various options and thus sometimes appear abnormal. They have an innate desire to live life on their own terms and conditions. In spite of her association with traditional American writers, her fiction is untouched by obscenity which clearly defines her Indian roots. Mukherjee's career can be conveniently divided in three well-marked stages: the phase of Expatriation (from 1972 to 1979), the phase of Transition (from 1980 to 1988), and the phase of Immigration (from 1989 onwards). Her latest novel *Miss New India*, published in 2011, portrays the modern India. The female protagonist of the

novel is a young woman, Anjali Bose, who is in constant search of ways to escape the conservative environment of Gauripur, a small-town in Bihar. The author has crafted the restlessness of a young woman who is in pursuit of happiness. She is not like the other Gauripur girls who would allow others to write her destiny. She had high aspirations in life. Although she is born in a conservative middle class family but she wants a Westernized lifestyle. Her quest for freedom makes her rebellious. Anjali's domineering parents did not allow her to mingle with boys due to the fear of people in Gauripur, who were supposed to be very orthodox and old fashioned. Their anxiety to find a suitable bridegroom for their daughter baffled Anjali. Mukherjee has depicted the frustration in her protagonist which makes her defiant towards her parents. She was not bothered about following the norms of the conservative society in which she lived. This can be seen in her following statement:

When the word got out, as it inevitably would, that Anjali Bose, daughter of 'Railways Bose' of Indian Railways, sister of working woman divorcee, was riding off in plain sight' with her arms

around the stomach of a foreigner, her parents would find it harder to make a proper-caste Bengali matrimonial match for her (MNI 13).

The author has depicted the dilemma faced by her female protagonist, who is constantly weighing her assets and liabilities in the marriage market. The Indian women have changed a lot. Traditionally Indian women stay at home. She stays at home and full fill everyone needs. But the Modern women have moved outside the walls and make their own identity in society weather it is education or social activities. She works and earns for family like the man. And today society also gives her respect and recognized her contributions to it. Mukherjee's novels represent the contemporary modern women's struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. Her female protagonists are at great pains to free themselves from stultifying, traditional constraints.

This is a city where call centers have created new culture, where Indians from small towns look for job opportunities which promises them a lucrative pay package. Anjali's visit to Bangalore was

sponsored by her English teacher, Peter Champion. She was asked to find accommodation at Bagehot House which was an old mansion of the British colonial era. There Anjali tries to adapt herself to American lifestyle like other girls living in that mansion. This is the kind of life she had aspired for. She tried to be professional but could not resist the temptation to explore the young, wild world. Anjali is an epitome in the novel. The author has portrayed her as an iconic figure. In the novel Parvati has made this gloomy observation about her; "The best I can come up with is you are like a reflecting pool. You give back wavy clues to what we are or what we are going to be" (MNI 190). In Bangalore she works at a call center. In her Journey, she meets dynamic young entrepreneurs and feels happy with the opportunities being created all around her. She encounters lot of hardships but ultimately she succeeds in gaining a new identity which she had always longed for. The author's description of Anjali's cultural dislocation is characterized by a keen psychological insight. The author has defined the "New India" as a bewildering mix of the old and the new.

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Her female protagonists are at great pains to free themselves from stultifying, traditional constraints. This entanglement of women in the mesh of tradition and modernity, between hegemonic values and contemporary women's transforming consciousness as a marginalized class, finds a ubiquitous place in the portraiture of women in the women's fictional works. Indian society, from ancient times has been very malleable and open to outside influences. It has willingly accepted the influences from outside and made adjustments and readjustments at different times. Although the structural changes have occurred many times there was seldom a functional loss or variation in the traditional order of the society. It is only during the past decades that the social change on Indian scene has started touching the functional part though in a limited way. The most significant social change in India was marked in the beginning of the twentieth century when Western education, secularization, emancipation of women, urbanization and Industrialization began to cast its spell on Indian society.

The idea of sleeping in their beds, hearing their children, cooking for them, sitting across from them

and watching them eat and burp, and listening to their voices and opinion for a lifetime put the idea of marriage in a category with a life sentence on the Andaman Islands (MNI 31).

The encouragement given by Peter and Rabi, the character followed in the trilogy, expose Bangalore to be a place of achievement and acquaintance. Anjali's desire to achieve great in the field of English is triggered by Peter Champion and Rabi. Ambitious girls, not just daydreamers Peter proudly say, "The money isn't my investment in you. My investment is you, Anjali Bose" (MNI 50).

The one reason why people do not see their dreams turn into success is the their dreams never go beyond a vague wish or an idea of what they might like to do someday. They don't realize that having a dream is only the seed. Dreaming about what one hopes to accomplish or wants to become is a good place to start, but to be successful, the dream needs to grow and branch out from mere wishing into solid goals, strategies, plans and steps for action. Anjali Bose in Miss New India shows symptoms of such dream that ends

in reality. The encouragement and confidence given by Peter Champion to move to Bangalore put her in a dilemma. “So if she married, she’d be lost to Peter. If she did not marry, she’d be dead to her father” (MNI 51). She tries to split herself into Anjali for her parents and Angie for Peter Champion: “splitting herself in two was a comfort” (MNI 51). In order to achieve what she wants, she decides what it is. This is the crucial step in her life as it decides her future. Deciding exactly what she likes to experience is probably the most profound, and influential deed. In Bangalore, she is given complete, absolute power over her dream and choice. She determines her destiny. Though eighty-two, she is very alert, talented and she knows all tactics in life.

Anjali Bose idealizes Minnie and tries to imitate her in great things in life having control over men. As a girl from village background Anjali gains knowledge of modernism through her stay in Bagehot’s house. She makes a choice of moving to an unknown place. With practice, she becomes one among the women in Bagehot’s house. She manages to overcome her fear of learning the American accent and her habit of going to the classes reaps the fruitful benefits. She feels better in Bangalore as

she develops positive attitude and she feels better about herself and life in general. It is impossible to feel positive and negative at the same time. So the more positive she is, the more positive feelings arise. She feels more peaceful, happier and calmer than she was in her own place and the only regret in her mind is that she missed her parents. She obtains a healthy self-esteem as she starts to know and she truly believes that she is a valuable person and has something to offer. She starts to trust in herself and her decisions. She develops some habits like practicing the American accent and getting on well with the person whom she feared at first. She wears the trendy costume of her friend and adapted to the foreign atmosphere around her.

Anjali Bose shows similar traits of her desire to achieve greatness. She compares her past life in Gauripur and her present life in Bangalore. “Now she is sharing a bathroom with a Muslim and a Christian” (MNI 126). Anjali becomes aware of the impact of Western culture in India. She never considers it as out of Indian living. She upholds her idea of nobility and plurality. She overcomes her fear of living in a metropolitan city. She readily composes herself to tune accordingly her friends Tookie, Husseina

and others who slowly expose the adolescent living in Bangalore. The American accent of Hussenia motivates her to become as fluent as her in speaking a foreign language. He has been a mentor and facilitator to Anjali getting her out of the inferiority complex. Her rehearsal to talk with Usha Desai initiates Anjali's job function. Call centers in recent years have emerged suitable for girls with perfect accent. "For instance, Husseina and Tookie lost their temper if anyone addressed them as call-center agents. They were "customer support service specialists" and don't you dare to forget it" (MNI 135).

It is Mukherjee's professed manifesto to celebrate the courage and humanity of suffering women who have rebelled against oppressive patriarchy. Her writings are efforts in the direction of creating a world of women. The effort is certainly rewarding both for the author and her readers. The novel, despite defects and discrepancies, rings a fervent note of sincerity and that is where their appeal lies. She enlarges the enormity of consequences. She recognizes the social, economic and psychological forces behind colonialism and strives to show how they dehumanize both the colonizer and the

colonized. Mukherjee expresses her own idiosyncrasy, one that is composed of tradition and modernity where a vision of life and love is valued.

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