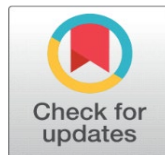
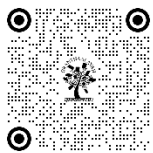


REVERBERATION OF DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S ARTISTRY: A CROSS-CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF MISS NEW INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Post-Colonial period witnessed a new phase in the geographical and physical environment of human entity. The new arena brings forth challenges in the form of migration and emigration. Migrations erased and re-inscribed patterns of being and belonging. The sense of being displaced and hybrid identity forced every one to tie up within the entirely different civilizations as well as perceptions. Eventually their hunger for connectedness found out a new interpretation beneath the designation of Diaspora. The word “Diaspora” etymologically derived from the Greek verb “diaspeiro” (dia means over or across and speiro means to sow or scattering seeds). Initially the term diaspora used to refer to the dispersed Jews after the Babylonian captivity. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, diaspora has been defined in reference to “anybody of the people living outside their traditional homeland”. In its contemporary usage diaspora indicates movement and dynamism, origin and belonging, community and culture, along with loneliness and isolation. Diaspora illustrates the hybrid and ever-changing nature of identities that are no more dependent on homogeneity, purity and stable localization. Diasporic literature revolves around the idea of homeland or a place from where the displacement happens, and it deal with the narration of harsh journeys taken on by the characters due to their expulsion. The writers of diaspora give voice to their sense of loss in an alien land and then gradually turn towards the process of reconciliation, assimilation and affirmation. The writers like V.S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Vikram Seth and Kamala Markandeya, Bharati Mukherjee, gives a different dimension to the background of immigrant writings, where they echoed their own voices for the fictionalized characters and the writer themselves merged with the story line for the perfection of real untold story of immigrants.

Bharati Mukherjee, one of the spontaneous figures in diasporic literature gifted a handful of literary masterpieces in the realm of diversity. When the Post-colonial field focused on the hybridity of immigrant's life Mukherjee seems to throw light on the plight of her women characters. The writer herself pictured every aspect of women as she alienated by her surroundings. 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. The characteristic features of Mukherjee's writings coincides with typical diasporic entities such as quest for identity, uprooting, and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt etc. It also serves as an outlet to the bent up passions, emotions and feelings, providing a ventilator to grievances and grudges. The present paper wishes to overview Mukherjee's novel Miss New India (2011) and wants to explore how the character establishes her own space.

Keywords: Migration, Transformation, Dislocation, Assimilation, Survival, Reconciliation, Reformation

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5168](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.5168)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The diasporic writings of Indian women writers grow along with the movement of Indian community throughout the continents. It has been said that Indians living outside of India continues to live in a 'sandwich world'. In one hand it refuses to give up their cultural roots while on the other hand the challenges to mix and adjust with the alien culture. Thus, most of the Indian diasporic writers live in a state of flux. These diasporic writers are generally divided into two groups or rather generations. Writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni represent the first generation while, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai represent second generation of diasporic writers. The first generation focuses the sense of alienation, the pain of migration, and nostalgia and above all the rootlessness from the homeland as the prominent subject matter. While in the second-generation diaspora, brings forth different scenario where the main characters are the children of the first generation and interestingly the country of their birth is different to the country of their origin. As a result, the children become confused between the cultures of their surroundings as well as their parents' home cultures. This sense of 'in-betweens' causes the loss of identity and alienation. Critics like Steven Vertovec in his "Three Meaning of Diaspora: Between Third World and First." is of the opinion that second generation diaspora tends to be more exposed to "the cross-current culture of different fields" (Vertovec 290). There is a diversity of cultures in the diasporas that co-exist, merge and emerge through hybridity. In the post-modern world cultural encounters are taking place on equal terms as a mutual acceptance of differences. Recent approaches have acknowledged and accepted the strength of hybridized and synchronized view of the world.

Diasporic women writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri have portrayed various shades in the lives of people including the issue of gender discourse, alienation in the alien land. The basic characteristic features of diasporic literature focused on the sense of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, and a quest for identity. Their personal experiences help them to understand and portray the happiness, sorrows and other struggles faced by women folk. In general, most of the stories narrated by them based on the issue of searching for individual identity and of Indian women in a complete new and diasporic situation and their journey to attain that identity. They get absolute success in narrating this theme and become the ultimate flag bearers of Indian women diasporic writing. The diasporic literature of the twenty first century is enriched by the issues of migration, transnationalism, cultural marginalization, hybridity and identity crisis. A complex framework in the field of global migration is formed by the cultural transaction, multiculturalism, topographical shifting and fluid identity. Apart from these, the concept of root, home, nostalgia, memory, alienation, hybrid identity is interlinked with the diasporic phenomenon. In the writings of Salman Rushdie, Agha Shahid Ali, Amitabh Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai and many others, they have used the diasporic elements which are also used as the current themes in their literary works.

Images of women in Bharati Mukherjee'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 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. 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* (2011) is a type of fable for the new homeland. The 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, she is the cherished student of a peculiar American uprooted teacher. The novel illustrates the journey of Anjali Bose, who leaves her family behind to get 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 center, 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 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 vigor and superior ambitions. Anjali's intelligent, ambitious and charming dreams of adventure and self-fulfillment convinced that she has the right to pursue personal happiness, Anjali is a member of the new generation of Indians. As the novel proceeds Anjali deserted the conventional way and chooses a 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," just as like Mukherjee's character Jasmine from the novel *Jasmine* (1989). In that novel the central character Jyothi transforms her identity through her voyage over continents and occupied the status of being Jyothi, Jasmine, Jane and finally Jazz. In *Miss New India*, writer exemplifies Anjali's transformation through the exchange of her name into Angie. Mukherjee represents the absurdity and humiliations in the high valued association of arrange marriages of boys with girls in Indian society. Even after the disaster of his elder daughter's arranged marriage, Anjali's father is resolute to choose a boy for Anjali 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. As 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" (MNI 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. Anjali's escape from her home town can be categorized as a rebellious act. She does not want to surrender before the atrocities of male dominating society.

Anjali is born into a traditional lower-middle-class family, 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: 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 dishonored me. He should be sent straightaway to jail (MNI 64). Mukherjee views Anjali as a symbol of resistance. The young gifted Anjali notices that her ambitions seem outsized and gigantic because of her small town Gauripur, the place where she started to dream for herself. She feels that, "a job is the key to success, she calculated. Money brings transformation, stagnation creates doubt and tyranny" (MNI 118). 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 centers, where they rapidly earn money. *Miss New India* is about that tussle between Anjali and Angie, each persona never relatively liberated of the other.

The novel is also about the nasty nevertheless positive change that can come from immigration, except it's from Gauripur to Bangalore. And it is in this ultra-modern city where Anjali 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. Her step to leave her home town is appreciable which shows a constant rejection to rigid patriarchal society 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" (MNI 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 center training school, also recommended by her expatriate teacher in Gauripur.

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" (MNI 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 manipulates her past in order to survive in her present. In faking her past life, she feels, "How liberating it felt, creating characters, obliterating oneself, being a composite" (MNI 99). She fails to cope with the American accent, "She had no idea. Strange monsters dwelt in the linguistic interstices of the English language (MNI 104). She gets glimpse of the call center culture of Bangalore. She comes to know that how the Indian people working at call centers have fake identities and name. They acquire a perfect American accent which is not their own accent.

Bharati Mukherjee tries to highlight the concept of fluid identities in reference to call centers. Anjali immediately comprehends the Bangalore culture of fake American names and identities in order to get a job and to survive in the big city. She decides: "No one in Bangalore seemed to be stuck with a discernible identity. She could kill off Angie Bose, and who would know, or care? She could be anything she wanted, a Hindi speaking girl from Varanasi or a Brahmin from Kolkata. Who do you want to be?" (MNI 95). The impact of America on Bangalore is very much clear with the boom in the call centers and their working, "Bangalore worked off the American clock. Everything about Bangalore-even its time-was virtual. Call centers ran 24/7; shifts were constantly starting or ending nine to twelve hours ahead of American time" (MNI 112). Bangalore is shown as an offshoot of America. In Bangalore, Anjali frequently keeps on changing her fluid identity like a chameleon. With the help of Peter's references, she stays in Bagehot house. Bharati Mukherjee also added a colonial era touch to her description of Bangalore. Bangalore is presented in this novel as a city with colonial background. Many places, buildings and even residents of Bangalore are of British background and nomenclature, "But Bangalore retained British place names too, like Kew Gardens and Cubbon Park" (MNI 83). Anjali's first encounter with the new city culture is baffling for her. She is surprised to observe the cultural shock.

Anjali Bose 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" (MNI 108). There she works at a call center, falls in love, meets dynamic young entrepreneurs and miracles at the destiny being made all around her. Anjali's assimilation in the new culture is evident from her act of sexual relationship with GG. She seems to enjoy it rather than lamenting on it. She admits about her transformation. "I'm a woman now, she said to herself. I'm quite a woman. I'm hot, according to Toookie. Secretive and oh so mysterious, according to Husseina Sherbet-cool, sherbet refreshing, according to Moni. And funny and fascinating, if I'm reading Mr. GG correctly" (MNI 227). Anjali changes over to Angie very smoothly, she lives the life of dual personality, "Without even trying, Anjali slipped into her high wattage Angie persona. Angie was smart, sexy, and special" (MNI 207). Anjali represents the submissive side and Angie is the confident one, "She could not be held responsible for anything that happened in her life because she was not an initiator of actions. Angie the bold one, the initiator, was beyond blame or shame. Anjali just watched and let things happen" (MNI 222). Anjali's experience of working as a call center agent gives her a chance to observe the American society and culture very minutely. She realizes that the youth of India in Bangalore live in India physically only, their language, their thought process, everything is tailored to fit in the American society. They deal with their customers as if they are not in India but in America only. The mystery about Husseina remains unfurled and also pushes Anjali into a mire of agony and pain. When she is interrogated about her name by the police, she thinks, "Angie. Anjali Bose. It conferred no identity. She didn't own the name. She could have been anybody" (MNI 249).

Anjali 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. 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-liberalization age group, fascinated by foreign brands, uncertain towards the swift success, leaving the values and ethics. Anjali's eventual appalling conclusion along with a short time in jail after all insists her to gather muddled belief and scattered somberness, taking back onto her high heels, ready to conquer the world once more. In her other novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002) 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. 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.

Even though Anjali is often described as Magnetic girl with smile she is strangely a passive character who stumbles on to society, she feels that living with her parents should make her getting married according to their wishes and she will lose her goal. But in the modern life Anjali loses her own family and she accepts sex to be causal. The rules and restrictions on the basis of traditions have been overthrown by modernity. Anjali wants to tie her future the tangles of modernity where her traditional practices restricted her believes. The protagonist goes through the phases of alienation, nostalgia and finally assimilation in Bangalore. Through Anjali the author tries to showcase the diasporic concerns of immigrants. Other immigrant characters in the novel are Minnie, Peter Champion and Rab (He is the son of Tara and Bish in Tree Bride. He has become a photographer. Rabi's migration from California to India is shocking for Anjali, "Now that's crazy. Why would anyone from California come to poppy little town like Gauripur? This is a prison!" (MNI 36). Anjali's trouble, slowly uncovered as the novel develops, opposes the certainty and display of the imaginary setting she dwells in.

With her new maturity Anjali 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. Bharati Mukherjee chronicles the discovery of the new India where Anjali is an emblem of 'Miss New India'. She makes her own way and finds a space for herself. Bharati Mukherjee remarks about Anjali that she survives and assimilates in the new city because she does not stop or halt but moves on unlike her mother and sister who compromised with their fate. Through the protagonist, Mukherjee shows that Anjali is full of dynamism and vigor and is in frequent quest for new prospects of modern India. She makes her own way and finds a space for herself. Bharati Mukherjee remarks about Anjali that she survives and assimilates in the new city because she does not stop or halt but moves on unlike her mother and sister who compromised with their fate. Her story confines the empowerment of each woman and Anjali's realization brought a new dimension to the story. Most of Mukherjee's women protagonist's have to undergone many alteration during the path to find out their existential reality. Just as Anjali from Miss New India other characters of Mukherjee like, Tara Lata from Tree Bride, Jyothi from Jasmine, Hannah Easton from the Holder of the World seems to share a same enigma of being dislocated, and they have similar circumstances as well as the external forces that acted as a temptation for their inevitable voyage. Finally, Anjali attained a new form within the unknown surroundings through her assimilation, thus she reformed herself for the existence of her reality.

2. CONCLUSION

Contemporary diasporic writings attempt to engage and grapple with living realities of women of various strata of society and endeavor 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.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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