

Alienation in Bharati Mukherjee's Miss New India



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Abstract:

The paper attempts to explore alienation in Bharati Mukherjee's Miss New India. Bharati Mukherjee is one of the most celebrated writers of the Asian American immigrant in America. Bharati Mukherjee's novels generally describe about Indian immigrants who struggle to settle in foreign countries which usually is America. Miss New India is an exception from all of her novels as it is written with an Indian background. In this novel Bharati Mukherjee does not describe the displacement of Anjali Bose, the protagonist of the novel, from one country (India) to another country (America) rather her life within her native country India is the subject of the novel.

Keywords: Immigrant, Alien land, Rootlessness, Anjali Bose, Home land

Alienation is a feeling of not belonging. This feeling can be mental, physical, religious, spiritual, psychological, political and social. In the beginning of the twentieth century, a close encounter with the western philosophical thoughts and the changing patterns of globalization and industrialization, have changed the phenomenon. Gradually, exile and alienation has come into full swing and has become an eminent theme of the modern Indian Literature. Globalization represents the most recent trends in the creation of one world. Privatization, modernization and liberalization are the other aspects of globalization. These are very important in the modern era. In this era, scientific and technological advancement in various fields has brought the world so close that national boundaries are losing significance.

Advance in transportation and telecommunications, colonization and desire for better life, education and work has lead and is still leading to a large scale migration of people, thoughts and ideas globally. The pull of social conventions and customs, the rapid change in social value system, the fast pace of living, and the development of multimedia have created tension in the minds of the individuals. A modern woman is doomed and finds herself in a tragic mess. The materialistic outlook of people and increasing commercialism further worsen the mental turmoil of individuals. The breakdown of the accepted values has resulted in increased inwardness. Consequently this increases withdrawal of the individual within his own shell. This inwardness this atmosphere of perplexity, confusion and anxiety further leads to a sense of rootlessness

which in turn brings in its wake its own problems and frustration that result in alienation. Woman considers herself to be an outsider with no sense belonging to his community. She sees herself estranged from society as she cannot identify herself with the contemporary society. The situation is a result of the lack of a harmonious relationship between what a woman feels inside and what is known about her from outside.

With the cross culture of globalization sweeping through the world, one of the most leading factors behind alienation is the migration of an individual to a new place. Basically, the insatiable greed of people to achieve more make them relocate themselves and their family in an alien land leading to economic and cultural independence of activities and their relations come with a price tag. Immigration is a stressful process for the people to adapt themselves to the society. The immigrants experience a myriad of feelings of nostalgia, alienation, suppression, frustration, moral dilemmas due to the stark contrast of culture of homeland and adopted land. All these feelings of diaspora immigrants are the focal point of Mukherjee's literary works.

Several youth leave their birth land and move to the improvised life. The process of the survival of the Diasporas individual in between the homeland and host land is the voyage undertaken in the whole process of alienation. It also has revived and achieved great heights in terms of expatriate inhabitant or migrant population in second migrant population in second half if the twentieth century. Once the people leave their original home land, they are feel really alone. Even while standing in a crowd of a hundred thousand people such a person feels isolated, alienated and totally alone. So the first step that the immigrant takes in the new land is the outcome of their deliberate independent choice to emigrate from their mother country. From now on they will be an individual in stark contrast to their role in one's previous existence. The new immigrant has to deal with people essentially different from themselves; they have to learn and understand alien ways; languages; they have to face unaccustomed problems; in short they have to survive in a grossly foreign environment.

The novel *Miss New India* portrays the struggle of the protagonist to cave a new path in the new world. The displacement of the protagonist is not from one country to another rather within the home country that is India. Anjali is an immigrant in her own country rather than in a foreign land. She is displaced from Gauripur to Bangalore results in many experiences as are faced by diasporic immigrants. Through Anjali remains in her home country, her dislocation poses the same problems of culture shock, alienation, nostalgia and quest for identity as for an immigrant in a foreign land. For Anjali, Bangalore is just like America.

This novel appears to be an excellent commentary on India's seismic shift, its growing culture of call centers, development of megacities, the rise of the outsourcing power house and the technological and economic boom. Bangalore has been presented as American replica of a city. It has been shown as the Silicon Valley of India as America is the Silicon Valley of the world. On her arrival to Bangalore, Anjali feels as if she has come to another planet which is completely alien to her. Anjali tries to refresh her mind but she feels unrefreshed. Her confidence has drained because of the dull ache of an early morning after a cold, wakeful night, the throbbing diesel clouds off a metallic ocean of dented bus roofs, the hundreds of vendors and laborers shouldering their bags and boxes. When she steps on the land of Bangalore, she is not

confident or enthusiastic but it drains off her confidence. Her journey from Gauripur to Bangalore is no less than an ordeal.

Bangalore as mentioned earlier is presented as America in this novel. The call centers are cultivating and progressing just to curb the demands of America. Bangalore is another America created in the map. The youth working in call centers are Indians who speak and live more of an American life that is alien to their own country. Barista is a coffee bar; there Anjali meets large group of noisy patrons of her age, dressed like her, in jeans and T-shirts. There many of the girls are smocking, gesturing wildly, and giggling like school girls. Angie doesn't see women smoke in Gauripur. except in movies. Here American culture and beliefs plays a larger role. This culture is very different to Anjali. Erich Fromm comments,

By alienation is meant a mode of experiences in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts-but his acts and their consequences have...The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He likes the others, is experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside positively. (120)

Cultural alienation is a world phenomenon today. The tremendous difference between two ways of life, leads a person to a feeling of depression and frustration. This could be called cultural shock. When a person leaves his own culture and enters another, his old values come into conflict with the new ones he finds. Anjali's first encounter with the new city culture is baffling for her. She is surprised to observe the cultural shock. She experiences the drastic difference between the life style of Gauripur and the life in Bangalore. Her encounter with some young working boys and girls in Bangalore makes her doubt about her potential. From a culture where society, family and rituals come first, family weddings and funerals are the incontestable duties and rituals of Indian life. She is now in a metropolitan culture where women smoke, girls keep two boyfriends, one for easy rides at the work and another for sheer fun, and she feels "The young people in Bangalore had no parents, no nearby families to appease" (92).

Anjali hears the offending words being used casually by the young in coffee shops and bars. She fails to cope with the American accent. The author writes. "She had no idea. Strange monsters dwelt in the linguistic interstices of the English Language. Back at the Barista, everyone was friendly, but I didn't understand a word of what they were saying" (104). She makes a companion of the English that she has spoken in her school to the English spoken by the youth in Bangalore.

Anjali is like an immigrant who not only feels alienated in the host country but also feels not belonging to her home country. Anjali is a woman who does not seem to have any past and future is equally uncertain. When she meets a police and an auto -rickshaw man, she faces language in Bangalore. Because she is unable to understand me local language, finally a POLICEMAN approaches and speaks to her in Kannada. The language sounds so alien, the tone so ambiguous, that she is not sure whether he is offering help or ordering her to move on.

In Bangalore, when she sees girls driving cars, she is amazed. There she sees huge American cars and big buildings. The city of Bangalore has the American imprint on almost everything. She is baffled as if she has arrived on a different planet. In Barista, Anjali thinks to buy tall iced coffee with a scoop of ice cream but when her turn comes to place her order, She does not because she does not have enough money to buy that.

After Anjali's arrival in Bangalore, she feels completely alienated and she starves a lot. There she is unable to read the Southern language scripts. She sees that every youth spends a lot of money for food in the city. And their language, their style, and the way of behavior are also different to Anjali. She thinks that it is strange to her. In Barista Coffee Bar she notices all young people around her. They pay a lot and eat different food but she has nothing to solve her starvation, finally she faints, "She hadn't expected to start her new life half-frozen, exhausted, and starving." (77) "She understood, in a way: Bangalore excited her, but it left her depressed. All the money made people go slightly crazy" (97).

Anjali finds a clear impact of western culture almost everywhere. The city Women don't seem jealous or possessive on any other people. Most of all the men are stout in the city. Their friendships do not lead to marriage. They have no parents, no relations. So the society does not care about them. They have come from all over India. In India, the town women are jealous and possessive on others. Young people have parents and relatives in town. So they always watch them. She compares the life of town and city life in Indian. She thinks,

The women didn't seem jealous or possessive. Most of them were plump and the men already getting stout like her father. Their friendship didn't seem like lead-ins to marriage. The young people in Bangalore had no parents, no relative to appease. No gossip or scandal could promise them. They had come from all over India to get away from gossip. (92)

The prologue of the novel, Miss New India clears the ground for the making of the India. The author writes about the migration of Americans to India. The Americans in the second half of the past century began streaming into India. These American immigrants settled in towns and villages of India and adopted the Indian language and life style completely. Their aim was to work for charity. Some of these Americans have returned back and some have married the native girls, stayed and got connected with India. They become part of India. "America had been wiped from their memory at precisely the time that young Indians were fantasizing about the west waiting schools and jobs that promised money and freedom. We were hungry for America, but they were sated with it" (viii).

One such American is Peter Champion. He comes to India on duty but after two years of his stay in Bihar, he does not go back to America and takes to study houses and public buildings of colonial era in India. He has been in India for thirty years. He devotes his whole life for service in India. He is the propellant factor for Anjali Bose to leave Gauripur and start a new life in Bangalore. He motivates Anjali as, "You have the spark -don't crush and burn. India is starting to wake up. India is a giant still in its bed, but beginning to stir." (x) Peter loves Ali, a Muslim boy. Ali goes to Lucknow for back-alley surgery, the sex change operation. Peter tries

to stop him but he doesn't hear Peter's words. The result is sickness, now Peter has lost ordinary All. And he lives with worries,

She heard the sobs. "Oh, Peter!" Anjali rushed to her teacher and sat cross-legged beside him on the matters. Peter's love story emerged in halting phrases "instant gratification" and black-market butcher," over and over again. Peter had counseled, cajoled, finally begged Ali to please be a patient while he researched and ranked safe big-city clinics and experienced surgeons. But Ali had acted on a grapevine lead in Lucknow from one of his secretive acquaintances. "Instant gratification" had compelled Ali to risk death or maiming. (174)

There are certain other characters in the novel who are shown as migrants. Migration has occurred throughout human history. Migration occurs at the variety of scale. They are intercontinental and interregional. The most often found immigration is happening in search of opportunities. Minnie Bagehot is one of the immigrants. She is the owner of Bagehot House. She claims to be British who comes to India with her husband and did not return back after India gets independence. And Rabi is an American by birth but he has his relatives in India. He does not stick to one place. He keeps on moving from one country to other. He confesses, "But I'm a nomad. I can't get stuck in one country or one city or even one house" (275).

Upon Anjali arrives in the alien city Bangalore, Peter contacts Minnie Bagehot, the widow landlady of once magnificent Bagehot Mansion turned Boarding house to which Champion has sent her. There she encounters a landlady who is unable to live beyond her own imaginarily constructed past and thus cannot help Anjali begins to cope with the present. Mrs. Bagehot Minnie is an eighty year old woman. Her forehead, cheeks and throat are deeply wrinkled and the wrinkles are spackled with pinkish face powder and orangey rouge. Her eyes are large and brown. Her voice is almost masculine and her accent is perfectly British. Her only one seventy-year old servant is Ashoke. She spends her life with loneliness. The author records, "The poor dear hasn't been out of her house in forty years" (179).

In the Bagehot House, the only language is English; it is the one of the rules of Minnie. In this house, Boarders are charged for receiving calls as well as making them. They pay an additional surcharge for calls that lasted more than five minutes. It is another rule. This rule is affects Anjali because she has less money and no cell phone. The author writes "Since Toookie, Husseina, and even Sunita had their cell phones, Anjali was the only one affected by Minnie's rules. She thought the rates unfairly steep" (127).

Bangalore is shown as an offshoot of America. After passing the landlady's interview' Anjali is allowed staying in Bagehot house. But the landlady provides small room to Anjali with large rent. With the help of Peter references, she stays in Bagehot house. She feels nostalgic in her new set up. In the night time, Anjali thinks about her home and fear about Bangalore. In her home, she sleeps with her mother and sister. So Anjali fears about lonely atmosphere of Bagehot's dark room. These thinks make fear to Anjali. In the city, she recollects the memories of Gauripure's neighborhoods noises, vendor's sounds and her father's commands.

Anjali befriends with three Bagehot Girls. Their names are Husseina, Tookie and Sunita. Tookie is a Christian girl. She is the employee of an Automobile Insurance Company. Her character is inscrutable. She has three sisters and five brothers. “Her stories about her family were amusing but nasty. Her father hadn’t worked in fifteen years, since a bus accident left him unable to sit long hours” (132)

Western culture has had positive and negative effects affecting our Indian culture. Keeping a boyfriend is a different think to Anjali, When Tookie advises Anjali to keep two boyfriends, one for the workplace offering, convenient rides and innocent companionship, and the second one for a fun-time boyfriend. On hearing these words from her girlfriend, Anjali is so shocked. She also remembers her roots.

Anjali’s next friends Sunita is a middle class Hindu family girl from small town. She works for her family until her father finds her a caste-appropriate bridegroom. When Anjali knows about Sunita’s family, She feels that her condition is as like as Anjali’s family. Husseina is another friend of Anjali. In the beginning, she helps Anjali a lot. When Anjali fears about to communicate with Usha Desai, Husseina gives training to her. She has huge room and costly dresses and accessories. Tookie often remarks “... there was no point in worrying about Husseina’s motives: “She’s so rich, she lives on a different planet” (150). She calls Anjali as a sister and borrows her clothes and also urges Anjali to wear her dress. These activities are tricks against innocent Anjali.

In Bangalore, she notices the changes in her life. Her father hates Muslim and Christian religions. However, now she is sharing a bathroom with a Muslim and a Christian friend. She starts drinking with girls and goes dating with Mr.GG, her lover. And also she has a cell phone gifted by her lover. Here she prepares a contact book for communication. Contact books are essential in Bangalore, but in village areas, they do not use contact book. Historically Indian Society is not structured around networking and contacts, but rather around family and community. In backward places like Bihar, allegiance to family and home town and religion and language group and even caste counts more than competence.

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, relaxes ethics personified by the other young women loading there, Islamic terrorism and contemporary fashion. Her rude exposures to all these make her feel alienated. “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. (137)

In her mind, Anjali thinks that she has run away from home, but not from the rituals of her family. “In Bagehot house, she realizes that it is difficult for her to escape from the family rituals. She feels “You could run away from home, but not from the rituals of family” (126).

After three days in Bangalore, Anjali writes letter to her sister Sonali. And she also sends a doll for Sonali’s daughter Piyali, in the letter she asks about her parents’ health and also she has a curiosity whether her parents have forgiven her or not. She writes about Mr. GG with her

happy experiences, but Anjali did not write about her miserable situation in the fabled resident. She writes, "Have Baba and Ma forgiven me? Have they asked about me?" (121).

Often Anjali thinks about her mother and her caring behaviors, she prefers only natural remedies for Anjali's beauty problems. In Gauripur her mother uses hibiscus hair oil to massage Anjali's scalp and she prefers yogurt to remove dandruff. "At bedtime, her mother had forced her to wrap her braids with thick cotton tape to prevent split ends". When Anjali knows her father has died of heart attack, she sheds tears unconsciously. She thinks of the shameful situation that would have happened to her father in Bihar after his death. Her thought travels to Gauripur.

Anjali believes that money and job bring transformation. They transform a girl from Gauripur and make into a woman from Bangalore. Her aim is to win a place in Usha Desai's training center and find a job. 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. Mrs. Desai runs a training institute for aspirations willing to work in a center. Anjali meets with Mrs. Desai at her institute and refines her American accents to find a job in a call center. There she struggles to say some words like 'f'ine on 'p'ine. And Anjali thinks, "She had failed the interview even before it had begun! For want of the correct fff sound, her future might be lost, Peter's gift of money wouldn't last forever." (18). Finally Anjali gets a job there.

The alienation haunts Anjali wherever she goes, not knows who she is, what she must do, or how she must respond in uncertain and complex situations. The mystery about Husseina remains unfurled and pushes Anjali into a mire of agony and pain. The innocent Anjali is arrested by police for the false charge of murder. Her arrest and horrifying experience at police station frustrates her and she becomes mentally unable.

When Anjali goes to visit Bagehot House with Mr.GG, she grasps the words of police who has wounded her mind. She feels that she has lost her identity. "In police than, she had been called a prostitute. What choice did a woman like her, homeless, jobless, skill-less, have? The police were right: she was a prostitute. What other name is there for, a young women without a job or means of support?" (261)

In all these situations the protagonist, Anjali is alienated. In Bangalore, her memories fully run along with her family thoughts. Here, she does not forget her cultural practices. And her superstitious beliefs also often come in front of her. She spends her life with guilty conscious because of the western cultural influences in Indian land. Immigration acts in both directions of development, the positive as well as negative. On one hand it opens the way for talented and professional work force from the other lands. But it also enhances the rate of competition and struggle for sustenance for the locals. 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 emulate those of the immigrants around the world.

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