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Exploring the Implications, the Outcry and the Outcome of Marriage in Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*

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Bharati Mukherjee's novels range widely across time and space dealing especially with the consequences emerging out of cultural confrontation of the East with West in the alien land. All her novels are female centered and deals with the changed psyche of the protagonist's behaviors. But her latest novel *Miss New India* (2011) takes a U-turn in dealing with the protagonist, Anjali Bose, in her own country i.e. India bringing the western cultural confrontational effects of highly sophisticated life style in rural and urban India. This paper focuses on the issues of marriage in typical Indian family in which marriage is considered as the utmost holy duty of parents. It also brings out the challenges, implications, outcry and outcome of marriage of the protagonist. *Miss New India* is the last of the trilogy consisting others two as *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and *Tree Bride* (2004).

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of contemporary writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion. Through women's eyes we can see different world, with their assistance we can seek to realize potential of human achievement. One of the reasons that women have, in such a large number, taken up their pen is because it has allowed them to create their own world. It has allowed them to set the condition of existence, free from direct inference from men. Similarly, so many women have taken to reading a women's writing because it allows a 'safe place' from which they can explore a wide range of experiences of the world, from which they can identify with a range of characters and a variety of existence. That's why women's writing has occupied such a significant and central place in women's lives. It is also why women's writing can share much the same disparaged status as women in a world dominated by men.

In the contemporary time of liberalization and globalization, women's roles have drastically been changed. They are not now only the object of gratification or their roles are confined to the four walls of the home. They have come forward in every aspect of human life. Some of them have broken the conservative patriarchal set of womanhood and crossed the limits of family restrictions to make their carrier bright and vibrant. They have also challenged the patriarchal marriage system to fulfill their desires and gains. They have not only participated in school games but made their presence in the fast growing society also. Such a sketch is portrait in *Miss New India* (2011) by Bharati Mukherjee.

Bharati Mukherjee an established, diasporic women writer has made her corpus in immigrant sensibility and cross-cultural crisis not only in American or Canadian context but also in India. All her previous novels or stories deal with the women protagonists in assimilation of alien cultures in alien lands. But *Miss New India* is purely set within India but the western cultural effects have played a vital role in developing the themes. It creates a new orientation of woman identity dealing with the conservative thoughts of patriarchal system and modern western life style cultural effects in growing India. It deals with various issues such as rape, international terrorism, false charges of murder, police brutality, arranged marriage system, teenage runaway, divorce life, gay life in India, prostitution, art of theft,

suicide, role of outsourcing of Indian economy, the art of photography, homelessness, telecom centers (call center life), immigrating in India and assimilation in Indian culture. These issues have been dealt with at the cost of destruction of many lives in the novel.

The novel is centered on Anjali Bose, the protagonist, a nineteen years old, tall, sportive, studying girl having good American English accent. Anjali is valorized by taking bold and unexpected steps to explore her life with new axes by running away from her hometown, Gauripur to Bangalore without knowing anybody, except having a sum of money and two addresses given by her teacher-cum friend, Mr. Peter Champion.

In the prologue of the novel, Mukherjee talks about immigrant concept in reverse direction i.e. some of rich western like the Aussies, the Canadians, the Germans, the Finns but specially the Americans--the one who stayed for months, then years lived like poor villagers; these rich westerns sometimes resorted to begging and got sick and other died from beggars' diseases. Among them one in hundred or thousand becomes reborn with no interest in returning home. They settle down in towns and villages, learn languages, and live Indian lives. They took modest job with foundation and charities. They took to the country side to collect music of tales, art and crafts. Some of them married local girls and some of them remain celibate, like Peter Champion, the American expat, Anjali's teacher-cum-friend. They connect their lives with India, and make their lives purposeful. They assimilated with real Indian lives.

Miss New India revolves around Anjali Bose; a B.Com student having her overtly features:

The conventional form of Indian femininity projects itself through long lashed, kohl-rimmed startled black eyes. Modest women know to glance upward from slightly bowed head. Anjali did not take in the world with saucer-eyed passivity. (3)

Mukherjee explores the opposition of tradition and modernity, the descent versus consent, through the microcosm of a sibship, two sisters—Anjali and Sonali, as its members adopt different environment, as 'family' stories and a global plots. Mukherjee uses the dynamics of a group of sisters (two) to explore the story in which a story is claimed, transmitted or denied, how even in the apparent homogeneity of two sisters' divergent roles are created, and what the social consequences come.

The opposition between the narrow traditional path and broad pathless present is embodied in the contrast between the lives of Sonali and Anjali. Anjali is not representative of a single girl from a rural town Gauripur but is a representative of all growing and aspiring girls from rural/undeveloped area of whole India. At the same time her sister Sonali is representative of a typical traditional girl obeying patriarchal norms silently.

The novel open with meeting of Anjali (dressed in T-shirt and jeans) with her teacher-cum-friend Mr. Peter Champion, at the outside of the Gauripur market near Pinky Mahal 'the town's three storey monument to urban progress'. (4) All women of Gauripur are not educated or self employed, some of them work as laborers during construction of Pinky Mahal 'rows of women workers had threaded their way along single plank, balancing bowls of cement on their heads and then dumping the content in to plastic buckets'. (4) Mr. Peter Champion asks her about her plan to go away from Gauripur to make her future bright as Peter says: "the money isn't my investment in you. My investment is you, Anjali Bose." (48) But Anjali puts her foot back saying that her parents are planning about her marriage as in Indian patriarchal society 'family wedding and funerals are incontestable duties and rituals of Indian life'. (7) Anjali explains her about her sister's arranged marriage which fails and Sonali, a divorcee, lives as a single mother with her four years daughter (Piyali) in Patna working as a secretary in an office:

The bridegroom was discovered too late, to be a heavy drinker and philanderer. But when Sonali has finally got up her nerve to institute divorce proceedings, their father turned against

her for wreaking on the Bose family, the public shame of divorce... A divorced single mother supporting herself and her four year daughter by working long days as an office typist. (7 & 17)

In fact, in Indian patriarchal society daughter and her life are directly linked with the honour of the family. In Indian society girls are allowed to leave their home only as a bride with a man selected by parents. When Anjali refuses for her marriage, her father gets angry and says, "It is not a question of happiness, yours or ours. It's about our name, our family reputation." (7) Anjali has no right over herself 'even, at nineteen, Anjali was determined not to yield her right to happiness'. (7) Mukherjee, experiencing the truths of Indian society, tries to explore the inner conscience of aspiring girls who become the victim of early marriage and finish their potential within four walls of the houses.

Mukherjee ridicules the traditional thinking about education of women in which job or personal growth is not much important but to increase marriage market value as 'that B.Com degree would increase her stock in the marriage market'. (8) Again it focuses on the conservative thoughts of people in which a minor ride of a young girl with a foreigner would create some problem in marriage market, as:

Anjali Bose, daughter of "railway Bose" of Indian railway, sister of a working woman divorcee, was riding off in plain sight with her arms around the stomach of a foreigner, her parents would find it her harder to make a proper cast Bengali matrimonial match for her...mind full parental wrath if she was to return home on the back of a man's bike. (9 & 11)

Anjali, the very aspiring girl, wants to do something exiting rather than to pass her life like Indian traditional women 'she didn't want marriage. Her classes were dull. She wanted something exciting, life changing, to save her from the tedium of Gauripur'. (11) Also, Anjali exposes her dream in her interview with Mrs. Usha Desai, as she says, "My ambition is to become call centre agent. It is my vocation." (182)

Mukherjee exposes the gay prospects in Indian society and condemns through the eyes of Anjali "...the two men shared closet space, which to her was unthinkable." (11) Anjali has a crush for three years with Mr. Peter, but Peter being a gay loves a man, his friend, Ali living with him in his room who dresses himself in ladies clothes 'she had a secret crush on her teacher last three years at Vasco de Gamma High school'. (6) Anjali thinks she would be happier to listen from Peter 'I love you, Angie; I always have, and won't let you leave until you agreed to go to America as my bride...' (12) Peter confesses Anjali: "It's too late for me to leave; but for you I want you the best. I'll do it! I'll make you happy! You must try larger city." (12) Peter advises Anjali:

Mumbai? You've been seen too many bad movies, Mumbai is yesterday. It's a hustler's city. Bangalore is the place for a young woman like...In Bangalore, if you've got the talent, there is a market. (12)

As far as Anjali's talent is concerned she has good command over English with good American accent, even better than her mother tongue Bengali, as she tells in her interview to Parvati (Rabi's mausi): "We are Bengalis, but my family settled in Bihar long ago. My Hindi is better than my Bangla, and my English is better than both." (181) Peter emphasizes Anjali to move away from Gauripur to emerge as a modern working girl in metropolis like Bangalore: "I told you at graduation you had to leave this place before you got trapped in the rotten marriage. I am telling you again, let that happen and you are as good as dead." (14) Here, Mukherjee tries to condemn the early marriage system in Indian rural society which spoils career of their daughters.

In fact, Mukherjee herself admits in her interview: "Her characters are a breed of pioneers who have the guts to forsake a predictable life in order to throw themselves in to a new one." (Interview in The Indian Express Sunday magazine) Anjali surrenders herself to the dragon of marriage market as:

To marry her off was her father's Hindu duty. Anjali accepted that. Given her willful personality, he was eager to marry her off before she sullied her reputation and disgraces the whole family; she understood that too. (17)

Sonali warns Anjali: "Match making might start as a small cloud to the distant horizon, before it was over, the marital monsoon would break, and no one in the world could hold the flood waters back." (18) Seeing the present life of Sonali 'A divorced single mother supporting herself and her four years old daughter by working long days as an office typist' (17) Anjali 'secretly looked forward to its destructive fury'. (18) Her father 'admitting the horrible mistake he made in hand picking Sonali's husband' (17) forces Anjali for her marriage. But 'in the Bose family, a married woman forced by circumstances to hold a job to make both ends meet was a tragedy'. (17) It indicates that Bose family does not like to have a lady of the family working. Literally, it means not allowing Anjali to go for a job in other town or so. Daughters' marriages become inevitable issues of Bose's life 'father's Hindu duty'. Girls are presented in such a manner like selling of an object:

Anjali's chapatti would be smeared with extra ghee (fat) to enhance her radiance, and sweetmeats (such as raabri, rasmalai, rajbhog, expensive treats the Boses would but only when they had guest) heaped on her plate in the hope that she would add a little more weight in all her right places. (22)

Finding a suitable Bengali Brahmin match is always a big problem and every parent is ready to face this challenge. Mr. Bose says to his wife, "I shall find a good boy this time. Your father wore out soles of his sandals looking and looking before he found me. I am prepared to do the same." (22) Mr. Bose continues the search and says his wife taking the sips of his whisky, "I am not despairing yet of finding a suitable jamai. If your father could find someone like me, I can find someone equally good." (23) In patriarchal traditional Hindu family, the voices or wishes of daughters' in selecting a boy for her lifetime are silenced. Anjali is not even allowed to think of the profession of her becoming husband as Mr. Bose warns her:

You think you can give ultimatum to your elders? May be I should marry you off to a village school teacher--- would you approve of that? Iron a dhoti under a banyan tree every morning ... you think my family and my salary are not good enough for an actuary or a tooth puller (dentist)?" (23)

On the other hand, Anjali being graduate in commerce from Vasco de Gamma, a reputed college of the town, has various other thoughts apart from restricting to only Bangla advertisements as Mr. Bose searches always Bangla Brahmins only. Sometimes Mr. Bose fires on her wife for producing only daughters:

You see what state you have reduced to me, woman, by not bearing sons? All my brothers are fathers of son. But me? Two donkeys for daughters...Donkey for wife, donkeys for daughters... Ill luck is ill Luck." (24)

Anjali finds no way to escape from the game of match making. She recollects the days when her father shouted at Sonali while fixing her marriage:

I have told his father you will marry this boy. Astrologer has spoken, horoscopes are compatible. I am printing the invitations. There is no more to be said. (24)

Even Sonali is not informed about his job or his nature which proves to be the main cause for the destruction of Sonali's life. All these make Anjali to think thousand times for marriage. Mrs. Bose is also worried and appeals to please Anjali, "You will have a new house in a new city with a new family of brothers and sisters and parents. You will become whole different person." (25) But Mrs. Bose never explains about the 'animal nature' of men in the marriage-bed drama described by Sonali. Through the voice of Bose family Mukherjee ridicules the patriarchal system of match making which is much based on astrology/horoscope rather than personal understandings. Mukherjee ridiculously argues:

Horoscope might correctly calculate astral compatibility. But marital happiness? That was in the hands of fate ... For Sonali, secret sexual union is neither an art nor a science. It's just a duty to perform. (27)

Anjali is not prepared for marriage except the decision forced by her parents. To her: The idea of sleeping in their beds, bearing their children, cooking for them, sitting across from them and watching them eat and burp, and listening to their voices and opinions for a life time put the idea of marriage into a category with a life sentence on Andaman Island. (28)

Thereby, Anjali rejects over thirty boys and none could qualify for her interview. Seeing these much rejection, Mr. Bose shouts on her: "I will decide who is good. I have left you too much in charge. You are abusing a privilege that was never yours to begin with." (28) Mr. Bose wails on his fate 'two daughters! No jamais!' (29) Mukherjee tries to show the helpless condition of a father having only daughters.

In the market of Gauripur Anjali spots Peter and 'she was about to lift her arm and signal, but no, she couldn't, not in a sari, with jangling bracelets. Angie-in-sari is Anjali, a stranger to her student self'. (30) Mukherjee portrays the dual identity of modern growing girls in the form of Angie with hyper thinking and Anjali in sari with no high hope, simply performing the duties of traditional wife---just producing children and caring family members on the cost of personal sacrifices. Her mother tells the conservative attitude of her mother-in-law (Anjali's grandmother): "The senior Mrs. Bose did not want a vain, ambitious, educated woman in the family, so she had demanded that the girl drop out of school just a month before graduation." (26) It shows that girls are educated in Bose family for the sake of marriage only not for any job or personal success.

At Sengupta's Marriage Portrait Studio, Anjali meets Rabi Chatterjee, 18 years old photographer (son of Tara Chatterjee of *Desirable Daughters* and *Tree Bride*) who reveals the truth from the portrait of Anjali. When Anjali asks him about the suitability of the photo as bridal candidate, Rabi replies: "No, your heart isn't in it." (33) Rabi also warns her: "If you're getting married for your father, it's crazy ... India's on fire. If you got married now, you will miss what's happening and you will be sorry." (35) Anjali again comes in dilemma as Peter has already put her in the state. Mukherjee also talks about hyper reality (simulacra) through the voice of Rabi, the photographer as he says: "Bihar is beautiful. Nothing in the world is as it seems---it's all matter of light and angles. Anyway, if it is a prison, there are lots of good pictures you can take from inside." (37) It gives some hope to Anjali to do something in life but under parental pressure she is just like a 'kathputali' whose strings is controlled by the patriarchal norms. Anjali has splintered self as 'if she married, she would be lost to Peter. If she didn't marry, she would be dead to her father'. (49)

With the help of Mr. Nirmal Gupta, the computer genius, finally, she posts her marriage ads on Bengaliwedding.com to find a suitable match. After a long wait the day comes when Mitra family agrees to visit Bose family to see the bride (Anjali) along with their highly educated son Subodh Mitra who has already worked in Bangalore in call centers. In fact 'the boy (Subodh) did engineering to please his father, but his heart was not in it. When he got a chance to study business, he shone like the sun'. (54) Mr. Mitra visits Bose family to negotiate the marriage and it results in a disaster to which none has ever imagined. Subodh takes Anjali inside his car and drives away to a very desolate place. Subodh rapes Anjali saying: "I am within my rights to see what I am getting." (58) 'He puts his hands over her breasts on the bright green-choli under the dhani-kali sari'. (58) When Anjali resists he says, "Everyone knows the kind of girl you are! ... Look at me when I am talking. I asked around. I know about you and your so-called professor." (58-59) Further:

He slapped her. Not hard, not an idle tap, either. He unhooked the bra and assessed her breasts... his hands were on her breasts, pulling hard, then weighing them, like small guavas... Subodh shouts on her, "Do me!" (59)

When Anjali comes to her senses, there:

Was Mr. Mitra with his trousers unzipped, and a pale, tapered thing standing up like a candle in his hand, a thing she knew of but had never seen, a long, tan, vaguely reptilian creature with a tiny mouth where its head should be ... Mr. Mitra's spare hand brought her head crashing down upon it. (60)

Subodh shouts at Anjali, "Open that big mouth of yours..." (60) He 'pulled her head up when she gagged, and then down by the hair, pumping her head until she was able to do it herself'. (60) This results in spewing over his paints and her sari. For Subodh, it is not a stupidity as he has been educated and worked in America and has the influence of western corrupt mentality in which sex is free and has no relation with morality, self-respect and ethics. Subodh says to Anjali: "Don't be stupid. I am going to marry you, your father almost begged me... Now, you know what you have to do... He pulled her panties down." (60-61) Thus, the virginity of Anjali is destroyed before marriage by the suitor Subodh.

Being ruined before marriage, Anjali do not commit suicide or something like that. In the night, Anjali slips off the bed and walks through the house, staring down at her parents in their oblivious helplessness. She wanders like a ghost and 'dropped her stained sari in a corner of the bath room. Let her mother discover the traces of her glorious jamai'. (64) Anjali decides to run away from home to Bangalore to fulfill her dreams and leaves her home in the night leaving Ma and Baba alone with a piece of written paper. Peter gives some amount of money and two addresses of Bangalore for immediate shelter. She moves to Patna to see Sonali and tells about the incident. Anjali tells Sonali, "It would be just like your marriage, except that he showed his true nature even before the ceremony." (70) Sonali is also not living safely as she replies to Anjali:

You think a secretary is just a secretary? You are such a child still... Men are men, they're all the same. You don't have to lead them on, it's in their nature. Do you have any idea the word 'divorced' means to any man? It means 'take it, it's free'. (71)

Sonali tries to show the picture of failed marriage. Also Sonali tells her:

What he does to you *before* the wedding or *after*, does it matter that much? Does it matter to ruin other people's lives? Four lives in my case. Baba's and Ma's, Piyali's and mine? (72)

Now both the sisters are cutoff from their parents and the devil of marriage has ruined both. On seeing her letter her mother fires on Anjali's father: "you see what you have done? No jamai and now no daughters!" (65)

After reaching Bangalore, Anjali takes shelter at Bagehot house, owned by Minni Bagehot at Kew Garden. Peter has given address of Bagehot house and Mrs. Usha Desai who runs a training institute for the aspirants of call center job. Later on Anjali takes training of call centre job and settles in Bangalore.

Later on, Peter sends a letter which reveals that Anjali's father is no more in the world and her mother is staying in Patna with Sonali. In fact, the devil 'marriage, the so called—holy Hindu ritual' has destroyed full Bose family. Thus novel explores the implications, the outcry and the outcome of marriage which is not much favorable.

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