

**Glocalization in Bharati Mukherjee's Novel: *Miss New India***

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**Abstract**

*Glocalization is the new buzzword in the post-colonial studies. We all live in a “glocal age”- where the global diffuses into local. Bharati Mukherjee (1940-2017) is known as a cosmopolitan writer of Indian origin settled in Canada and then in the United States of America. In her writing, she discusses the topics of immigration, transnationalism, multiculturalism, globalization etc. Bharati Mukherjee's novel Miss New India highlights the glocalization of India post 1990s. Interwinding the local with the global, Mukherjee sheds lights on the changes brought about by the globalization in India, depicting the massive migration of ambitious and audacious young Indians into Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley. Mukherjee portrays twenty-first century India in a digital age where the young men and women from mofussil towns making their presence felt in the global world through their skills, ideas and hard work.*

**Keywords:** *Glocalization, Post-Colonial Studies, Cosmopolitan, Globalization*

**Introduction:**

The mixing of the local and the global is known as ‘glocalization’. It is a neologism word i.e. coined and invented newly. First popularized in the English-speaking world by the British sociologist Roland Robertson in the 1990s, and later developed by Zygmunt Bauman, the term glocalization is a combination of the words ‘globalization’ and ‘localization.’ Both terms became aspects of business jargon during 1980s, originating in Japan, but its use for post-colonial studies has been principally in its foregrounding of local agency against a seemingly relentless global culture. Globalization is itself always local and while globalization operates according to ‘flows’, the agency of the local ensures that the flow is very often reciprocal. The concept is present in slogans such as ‘think globally, act

locally' but it has accompanied the greatly nuanced view of the relationship between the local and the global that has been introduced by post-colonial studies. Theorist have intertwined the concepts of the *global* and the *glocal*. Although it is widely discussed by social scientist, many literary writers expounded on the concept of globalization in their works. The term has also been included under the concept of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism represents a broad and extremely popular interdisciplinary field, one that has captured the attention of the intellectual community since the dawn of the twenty first century. In scholarship, the mere presence of transnationalism is often used as an indication of cosmopolitanism and the liner positive correlation between the two is thereby implied. Massive human displacement has been a hallmark of the current wave of migration and globalization. Globalization is a contemporary dynamic that has generated mass migration from Asia to the Americas in the past three decades and provides an impetus and context for the comparative study of the experience of Asians across the America.

However, it is imperative to understand the term globalization and its limitation. The word globalization has been the topic of study to academics for a long time. By its very nature, the idea of globalization seems to defy easy definitions. In its literal sense, globalization is the process of metamorphosis of local or regional phenomena into global one. In his preface to *The Cultures of Globalization* (2004), Fredric Jameson rightly calls globalisation the “proverbial elephant,” perceived differently by various “blind observers”. Globalization is the increasing interaction of people through the growth of the international flow of money, ideas and culture. Providing explanatory contexts for phenomena as diverse as global tourism, climate change, Jihadi terrorism, the power of transnational brands, mass migration, the spread of the English language and growth of global media. Suman Gupta in *Globalization and Literature* (2008) argues that globalization accounts for a transcendent entity that affects a wide range of human life. Globalization is often linked with liberalism, a phenomenon of post 1990s. Similarly, globalization is also seen as a revival of modernization theory of post 1950s and 1960s. Anthony Giddens interpreted globalization as the spreading of western modernity around the globe. As he suggests, “Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles and vice versa.”

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the major novelists of Indian origin who have achieved popularity in the Western Literary Circle. Her writings include seven novels. A thread that runs through all her work is difference- cultural, religious, racial, sexual and economic class difference. J. A. Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* inducted her writing as a cosmopolitan writing as it is concerned with global/universal themes and issues (political, social and otherwise) and with the attitudes and language involved in any discourse

on such themes and issues. It is concerned too with individual persons: for instance, immigrants. The present paper argues that though Bharati Mukherjee's works reflect the impact of globalization and immigration on the characters of her work yet there is a blending of global and local in her novels. Attempt has been made in this paper to find out how the idea of glocalization is expressed in her novel: *Miss New India*. I am using the concept of glocalization to exhibit the impact of globalization on the characters, settings and cultures. The impact of globalization is not simply one way, domineering and destructive but reciprocal, transcultural and eventually transformative. In her interview, "Globalization and Change in India: The Rise of an Indian Dream in *Miss New India*", Mukherjee herself explained that as an author she wanted *Miss New India*, through its large cast of characters, to present a complicated response to the transformative effects of globalization. The novel *Miss New India* is the story of a teenage girl from small-town Bihar in India. She decides not to submit to her parent's wish and take control of her life. The novel is about her struggle to build a new life. However, the novelist also gives us a panoramic view of new India driven by the IT boom and digital prosperity. A close reading of the novel makes us aware that the widening gap between local and global is diminishing rapidly and Indians even without leaving their locality are influencing the world and creating a global presence. This glocalization of Indians is everywhere and it is not by invasion or aggression or compulsion but by sheer indulgence of their presence, which is complemented with skills, attitude and grace. To put it simply, the USA, being the richest and the most powerful country in the world, is the epicentre of globalization and whose leadership advocates the policy of America first; India on the other hand is an excellent example of glocalization that has contributed its local skills to global benefit.

"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" (Prologue: x), says Peter Champion an expatriate American in the novel. He represents both global and local colours in his personality. He is *gora sahib* in colour but *desi* in heart. In fact, in the prologue the writer describes how the 1960s had seen American and other westerners flocked to India to overcome their ennui aroused from the consumerism and absorbed into Indian society. In the mid-1960s, many Americans like Beatles became interested in Indian culture:

*Young Americans- the disillusioned, the reckless, and the hopeful- began streaming into India. The disaffected children of American affluence: college dropout, draft dodgers, romantics, druggies.* (Prologue: vii)

They represented the rebellious youth of sixties indulged by their affluent parents. They were the newly sprung higher middleclass who lacked the capacity for delayed gratification that characterized previous generations. What they wanted, in a word, was "fun." However,

Mukherjee describes how one in a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand absorbed in the locality of India.

*They settled down in towns and villages, learned the languages, and lived Indian life. They took modest jobs with foundations and charities. They taught English and took to the countryside to collect music and folktales, arts and crafts. They married local girls or stayed celibate, and identified themselves with Indian needs and aspirations* (Prologue: viii).

Ironically, at the same time young and talented Indians are attracted towards the West for jobs and education. It is a two-way trend: Indians are going abroad to secure a bright future, and overseas children like Peter come to India in search of their soul. *We were hungry for America, but they were sated with it* (Prologue: viii). This synergy of global and local is highlighted throughout the novel. So, when the Indian professors boast of their global degrees and intimidate the local Indian students with their legendary achievements Peter Champion jokes about his mediocre education. He encourages Anjali to pursue her dreams as India is changing and not to yield to her parent's wish.

"Companies fail when they keep making the same product in the same way, even when the customer base is changing. Well, the base—that's India today—is changing and the old ways are dead ways. This marriage portrait is a wasted effort," he explains (48).

Bharati Mukherjee intertwined the local with the global. The novel begins in the small town Gauripur in the state of Bihar. It tells us the story of Anjali Bose, a nineteen-year-old girl with overly assertive features which charms the foreigners. Although her parents looking to the day they would have to marry her off, she decides to find her destiny on her own. With Peter's help, she arrives in Bangalore, a thriving IT hub, crowded with young migrants, who like her, having come in search of jobs in call centres. The cosmopolitan city like Bangalore mirrors the effect of globalization on the local settings and its people. Anjali encounters a bunch of call centre agents on her immediate arrival. They are of the same age of her and exceeding with confidence. This is the outcome of globalization on local. They have come from all over India with trained Chicago accent and calling each other Mike, Darren, Millie and other US names. Their minimal vocabulary and slang American English is beyond the understanding of Anjali who was trained in small town like Gauripur. It is a cultural shock to her. Yet she is overwhelmed by the way these young live their life with no worries.

*These people seemed better than she was, even though their vocabulary was minimal and they looked like servants or movie prostitutes.... (89) Angie knew the meaning of the words 'fuck, shit, asshole,' though she'd never used them. Where do young Indians learn to use such language? (92)*

The above communication is happening among the young group in their twenties in a cosmopolitan city like Bangalore. But most mass communications are not and have not become global (meaning happening all part of the world). One study about cosmopolitan communication observes that mass communications have been profoundly affected by the broader phenomenon of globalization—the process expanding networks of interdependence spanning national boundaries that follows the increasingly swift movement of ideas, money, goods, services, ecology, and people across territorial borders. The young group at Barista may be passed off as ‘Westernised’ or ‘Americanized’. They are the few faces of new India or the citizens of glocalised world.

*Their friendships didn't seem like lead-ins to marriage. The young people in Bangalore had no parents, no nearby families to appease. No gossip or scandal could compromise them. They had come from all over India to get away from gossip. (92)*

Anjali wished to be part of such a flow and to be carried along like a twig in a flood.

*The young people were just like her, open and friendly, and probably held the kind of job she was hoping to get. She'd heard that ten thousand agents a month were hired, and six or seven thousand quit or let go. (93)*

This much-touted cosmopolitanism of Bangalore make the city to be called as “Asia’s Silicon Valley.” Unlike many other parts of India even the dhobis and auto rickshaw drivers are conversant in English. With the hordes of Hindi-speaking techies and workers who flooded the city, a new lingua franca has emerged to rule the city. The world presented by Bharati Mukherjee was a revolutionary phase in India’s globalization though it seemed now out of date. Call centres, when they first appeared on the horizon, were a source of academic debate: the generous salaries, the atrocious timings, the language, the changing of Indian names to more American-sounding ones, the braking of taboos—all have been well-documented in feature films, articles and even books. Their impact was enormous, and suddenly India was connected 24×7 to the rest of the world. It is against the backdrop of this “new” India that Mukherjee has set her novel. The author chronicles the protagonist’s wide eyed discovery of the new India; her migration from Gauripur to Bangalore is almost like a move to a new country. Every accent, every attitude seems incredibly foreign to the girl from small-town Bihar. Yet she slowly makes her way and finds her place in the world.

One of the characteristics of glocalization is the societal co-presence of sameness and difference. There is universality as well as particularity in glocal world. Mr. GG is both proud of Indian achievement, and prosperity as well he is ashamed that no poor people can be a part of this development. He compares Bangalore to Los Angeles.

“Well, it’s lot like LA, but it took LA a century. They had a movie industry, and we’ve got hi-tech. We’re both virtual and we’ve both got buried bodies, but we’ll be a much bigger city in maybe five years” (102).

He, describes Bangalore as the most advanced city on the planet. There is a decisive acceleration in the scale, density, and velocity of interactions that cut across the national boundaries.

“Every company in the world had to have a Bangalore address, and every modern mogul from India, Korea, Japan and the Middle East had to have a Bangalore condo or mansion. Every business in the world is outsourcing. Without us the world would collapse,” he predicts (100).

This globalization of the local and the localization of the global is explained by Khondker (1994) as the twin processes of macro-localization and micro-globalization. Macro-localization involves expanding the boundaries of localities as well making some local ideas, practices, institutions global. In the novel, *Miss New India* Mr. GG talks about how his company Vistrionics is a perfect example of glocalization.

“If you dismiss it as outsourcing, then you’re simplifying a complicated reality. Vistrionics is a kind of outsourcing—we’ve drawn on a variety of resources—but no one else in the world is doing what we do. We might have started as an appendage technology, but we’ve evolved. Now we’re outsourcing to Kenya and Bangalades. And I see us, in maybe three years, outsourcing our technology to the United States” (161).

His thoughts are echoed by other characters in the novel like Ms. Usha Desai and Mrs. Parvati Banerji who run a BPO training institute CCI. They object to the popular notion that BPOs are all about training Indians to sound like Americans. They give an account of how their American clients were resolute about Indian graduate with perfect American accent to fool their American clients.

“India was déclassé, and Indian-accented English laughed at,” Usha continued. “So, what does that do to a well-prepared, intelligent, motivated young agent who’s mocked as soon as she opens her mouth? That’s what we told our corporate clients. Do you want a human answering tape, or do you want a proactive, efficient employer?” (162)

Their points made their clients to accept the competence of Indian accent. Usha also talks about training young women from mofussil towns and villages to earn their living in a respectable way. For Anjali, a Gauripur runaway girl, Bangalore wasn’t about global economic. It is place for her and many to rebuild their life just like a tsunami survivor. She calls it social revolution. “We are soldiers in a social revolution” (163). However, the novelist



also presents the pitfall of globalization. Peter Champion expresses his doubts and displeasures on this “outsourcing revolution.” He believes that the prosperity brought out by the outsourcing took away the civic morality and dignity from the people of modern India. He says,

“Prosperity is a good thing. But I’m not so sure of the wealth that comes from outsourcing. I wish the prosperity was rooted to something” (159). He points out that, “We’re tied to American prosperity. If America goes under, we’ll down” (161).

But Mr. GG is well assured of India’s financial future. He believes that the debt-ridden America will create an outsourcing boom time in India.

“Best of all,” he rhapsodised, “this is our chance to leapfrog and win the creativity race. We Indians are genius inventors, not just cut-rate *mistris!*” (300).

To conclude, Bharati Mukherjee’s *Miss New India* has given us a glimpse of glocalized India where global and local permeate one another. Mukherjee presented before us two faces of modern India. One is the provincial town of Gauripur in the state of Bihar, reflecting the old India with its traditional and conventional middle-class population while the other is Bangalore, the “Silicon Valley of India.” The Bangalore that unfolds through the novel reflects the “New India”: a society in which the traditional barriers to social and economic advancement — caste, hometown, mother tongue, gender, etc.— are less relevant. The city is more like an American city than Indian. The impact of America on Bangalore is very much clear with the boom in the call centres and their working.

“Bangalore worked off the American clock. Everything about Bangalore—even its time —was virtual. Call centres ran 24/7; shifts were constantly starting or ending nine to twelve hours ahead of American time” (112).

Glocalized cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, Pune have become the call centre ‘hub’ towns where young men and women from all over India pour in to reap the fruits of globalization. They do not have high-profile degrees from Stanford, Harvard or Yell. But as Mukherjee noticed that they do have an asset: fluency in Indian English, thanks to their having attended English-medium high schools run by missionaries. And they know how valuable fluency is in new-niche professions, such as outsourced customer support service, opened by economic globalization. As a part of their jobs they easily soak in the role of “American” but they remain clear-headed about who they are: new Indians in a new India.

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