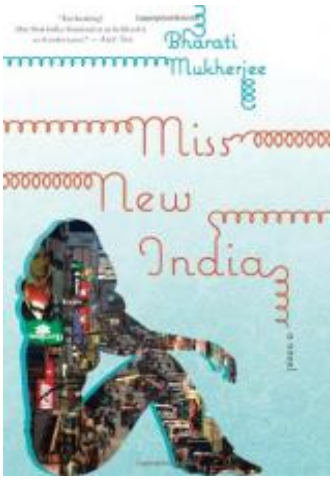
Miss New India

by Bharati Mukherjee



About the Book

Anjali Bose is ?Miss New India.? Born into a traditional lower-middle-class family and living in a backwater town with an arranged marriage on the horizon, Anjali?s prospects don?t look great. But her ambition and fluency in language do not go unnoticed by her expat teacher, Peter Champion. And champion her he does, both to other powerful people who can help her along the way and to Anjali herself, stirring in her a desire to take charge of her own destiny.

So she sets off to Bangalore, India?s fastest-growing major metropolis, and quickly falls in with an audacious and ambitious crowd of young people who have learned how to sound American by watching shows like Seinfeld in order to get jobs as service agents at call centers where they are quickly able to out-earn their parents. And it is in this high-tech city that Anjali --- suddenly free from the traditional confines of class, caste, gender, and more --- is able to confront her past and reinvent herself. Of course, the seductive pull of modernity does not come without a dark side...

Discussion Guide

1. Anjali?s outcome seems purposefully ambiguous. Discuss why the author may have done this.

2. What are some of the challenges facing a small-town girl raised in India as opposed to a small-town girl raised in the United States? How do they compare?

3. Explain why you think the author decided not to have Anjali deal directly with what happened to her by Subodh?

4. Mr. & Mrs. Bose are not identified by name for the first half of the novel. When does this change, and why? How is Anjali identified in this same passage as Mr. and Mrs. Bose are named? By doing this, what is the author saying about Anjali, a character who is constantly searching for a new identity?

5. Why do you think the author chose to name the novel after a beauty pageant? What is the significance of this title?

6. Eventually Anjali questions her long held beliefs about who her mother was: ?What if the bitter wife and nagging mother had actually been a contented, creative woman?? (p. 202). Does this moment bring her any closer to understanding her mother?

7. Cars have significant importance in Anjali?s life. What does the car symbolize in this book? Explain why the Bengali Svengali compares her to a car.

8. Anjali has a complex relationship with Gauripur, her mother, and Sonali-di. While the fate of her mother and sister is left undetermined, the future of Gauripur is revealed. ?She walked the familiar streets with Parvati, but now she saw changes --- maybe they?d always been there --- a cinema house, the Bihar State Emporium, and apartment blocks rising from razed, abandoned estates? (pg. 328). What makes Gauripur different? Why are we left in the dark regarding Anjali?s mother and sister?

9. By the end of the novel Anjali has an entirely new family in Parvati: ?Anjali had, in effect, been adopted? (pg 328). Discuss the role family plays in the lives of the different characters in the book. How do they define family, and what is its significance?

10. Discuss the novel?s setting. What limitations and liberations did the ?New Miss Indias? experience during their time in Bangalore?

11. How do the men in Anjali?s life compare to each other? Why does Anjali refuse GG?s request to accompany him to Mexico?

12. Discuss Anjali?s initial difficulty understanding Peter and Ali?s relationship. Explain whether her ignorance was due to her crush on her former teacher or ?outside her ability to process? (pg 41).

13. After what happened to Nirmal Gupta, Anjali feels she owes it to him to renew her search for a husband. Why do you think she decided to honor Nirmal in this way?

14. How does Mukherjee question the traditional roles of women in India? Where did you see similarities between how women are treated in this country and your own communities? How does Peter make Anjali see and question her own role as a woman in Indian society?

15. The theme of re-inventing oneself is a prominent one in **Miss New India**. Throughout the novel Anjali vacillates between different versions of her name. How does she make her ultimate decision, and why?

Author Bio

Bharati Mukherjee is the author of five novels, two nonfiction books, and a collection of short stories, THE MIDDLEMAN AND OTHER STORIES, for which she won the National Book Critics Circle Award. She is currently a professor at the University of California at Berkeley.

Critical Praise

"Enchanting! Mukherjee's pitch-perfect ear for character and mood and her story-telling gifts capture the exhilarating restlessness of a young Indian woman's pursuit of happiness. **Miss New India** illuminates as brilliantly as it entertains."

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