



Transfiguration Of Hannah's Voyage Into History; A Remoulding Of Bharati Mukherjee's The Holder Of The World

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ABSTRACT

Women writers of Post Colonial span deliberately pointed out the embarrassment of female protagonist. The wide range of literary outcast reflects the shadows of colonial impact in the present era. Post Colonial literature addresses those questions that emerge in relation to the aftermath of imperialism. Theorist like Franz Fanon investigated the consequence of colonial imperialism through his work *The Wretched of the Earth*. The literary canon expanded over up to the domain of Diaspora, Multiculturalism, Hybridity etc. The diasporic writings figure out the enigma of immigrants and expatriates within the homeland as well as from their host land. The writers such as V.S Naipaul, Anitha Desai, Arundathi Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee gave a new reflection for their stories. Mukherjee's characterisation of her female immigrants came across all the barriers of transformation. Her novel picturises the powerful women characters as an embodiment of true self. The present paper aims to study Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*, in order to find out the ways in which the character Hannah redefines herself within her constraint surroundings to make a path for her own self.

Keywords: Bharati Mukherjee, Historical Implications, Collision of values, Comparison Between East and West, Unification, Transformation, Self-Realisation.

INTRODUCTION

National Book Critics Circle Award winner Bharati Mukherjee has long been known not only for elegant, evocative prose but also for her characters. Her characters create new iconic realm within the sphere of their self-actualisation. Mukherjee reflects the dilemma of expatriates through her novels such as, *Jasmine*, *Desirable Daughters*, *Tree Bride*, *Miss New India*. The diasporic interpretation provides a vast realm for her characters to occupy their own space. When the story echoes the untold parts of historical interpretation, Mukherjee raises her creative arena to another scope of realization. Bharati Mukherjee has explored the multiple self- reinventions possible as a result of the continual displacement. Her major theme includes immigration to the West, psychological transformation and the violence that accompanies it, women's perspective and search for autonomy, and a hybrid worldview that relies on her roots, Americanization, and, increasingly, on transnationalism.

The Holder of the World by Bharati Mukherjee's fourth novel resounds the echoes of history. The novel is an ideal unification of the past and the present where the author is seen tracing the story of Hannah Easton, a New Englander, who was ultimately reckoned as the mistress to a Mugul emperor. The novel deals with transitions

in geographical and cultural space - from America to England, then to India. The novel is faultlessly combined the contemporary scenario of diasporic sensibility, where the writer is seen describing the plot of Hannah Easton. The story strengthens the concept of expatriation as a trip of the human mind. It obviously displays the voyage of a woman, like a hero who not only leads to examining of the self but also identifies herself. She returned back to her homeland, not as a rehabilitated American but as an unorthodox person living on the outer edge of the public. The difficulties and conflicts between the eastern and western world are shown in a better way. Mukherjee actually ties the threads of history together, from one side of the world to the other, suggesting infinite permutations.

The story is about Hannah, told by Beigh with an emphasis on certain themes like the merits of attempts to recapture the past, the collision of values that inevitably occurs when New World meets the Old. *The Holder of the World* is a tale about dislocation and transformation arising when two cultures come into contact with each other. In this novel, Hannah Easton, the protagonist, emigrates from the United States to India in the seventeenth century, she considers her host land as her second homeland yet she undergoes some sort of expatriate feelings at the later stage. The story takes place in the seventeenth century and during this time; India was under the control of Mughals. The protagonist maintains a constant touch with the host land and the homeland. She is in the in-between situation from the beginning to the end of the novel. She experiences the predicaments of expatriation such as cultural conflicts, identity crisis, difference in the race, colour way of behaviour and isolation.

The novel dealt with the conventional subject of the diaspora outcast as well as expatriation. Bharati Mukherjee clearly portrays the difference between the life in the homeland and host land. The beginning quotes from the text itself clearly shadows what kind of transformations the character has to undergoes in their voyage to new land,

"I live Eastern, Central and Pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future" (Mukherjee 1). The novel inserts immigrant culture and history into the American nurtured novel, Mukherjee is also claiming a place within the canon of American literature for immigrant writers like herself.

The protagonist, Hannah undergoes multiple levels of metamorphoses and occupies different names throughout the novel. While she is born as Hannah Easton, orphanhood and marriage transform her into Hannah Fitch and then Hannah Legge respectively, then later Salem Bibi. Much like Mukherjee's character Jasmine in the novel of the same name come across the same transformation as Hannah does. Reborn to herself in three continents and discovering her dynamic consciousness and individuality as she travels, Hannah is a precursor to Mukherjee's 20th century immigrant protagonists. Her multiple names – she is Hannah Easton in Massachusetts, Hannah Fitch in Salem, Hannah Legge in England, Precious – Pearl in India, and the "Salem-Bibi" into history – and her changing identities attest to her resilience to survive on often malevolent foreign territory.

Mukherjee unfurls the story of Hannah's life within a framing device following asset hunter Beigh Master's pursuit of the Emperor's Tear- a precious diamond once belonging to Emperor Aurangzeb and allegedly, Hannah herself. Through her historical artifacts Beigh uncovers the untold history of Hannah. She also studies the transformation of Hannah as she shifted up to different surroundings like, East India Company outpost in Bengal, war torn Massachusetts and Salem. Her research leads Beigh to realize the connectedness from her own ancestral history. From Beigh's perspective, Hannah's greatest qualities lies in her open-mindedness and flexibility," In other words, at the age of thirty, Hannah was a pure product of her time and place, her marriage and her training, exposed to a range of experience that would extreme even today's world, but none of it, consciously, had sunk in or affected her outer behaviour" (Mukherjee 245).

Hannah crosses the borders physically, socially and morally. Her unconventional perspective first appears in the vibrant needlework of her youth and her attachment to Gabriel despite his deceptions- all for her love of adventure. The life story of Hannah proved that the novel explicitly covers the theme of immigration and transformation. In short Mukherjee plots a zigzagging narrative route, compressing different places and periods on the same plane. Shakuntala Bharvani says, "the themes of transformation and migration are presented in this novel in a totally new and unique garb. She attempts to give colour and interest to the kind of novel which has had its day-early history of the Sahibs and memsahibs in India "(189). Mukherjee reverses her plot while earlier novels highlight the plight of Asian immigrants, who come to America in the hope of a materially better life and try to adjust and survive in the alien culture. But the present story brings back a different kind of assimilation in between the East and the Western culture.

In Hannah, Mukherjee presents a definitively American character, one born of migration and transformation. Hannah 's grandparents immigrated to the New World on the *Angel Gabriel* in 1633, on an actual British ship of the same name, built for Sir Walter Raleigh for his final 1617 voyage to America (Haines and Haines 331-2).

With their infant daughter Rebecca in tow, Hannah 's grandparents moved from a colonial centre (Beigh suggests Boston or Rhode Island) to Brookfield, Massachusetts, a Puritan colony in Nipmuc Indian territory. In 1668, Rebecca married Edward Easton, an immigrant from England and a former employee of the East India company, and two years later gave birth to Hannah. A year later, Edward died of a bee sting. After six years her mother eloped with a nipmuc lover. Hannah, all over her life seems, to serves as a medium to the suffocating recollections of her memories "she, too, longed for escape from the stifled knowledge of her mother 's affair and a stagnant community" (Mukherjee 67).

Eventually she rooted up to Salem by Robert and Susannah Fitch, who with affection and fondness bring her up under Puritanical limitations. A voyage of the protagonist is not considered as unintentional or instinctive. Her life is in the form of an additional discharge after the rule-surrounded, suffocating inspiration in the World of the Puritan. Her initial lifetime opinions are the greatest and vigorously a captivation aimed at desire and sensation, that she intertwines addicted to her multi-coloured, cheerful embroideries, "the embroidery is the embodiment of desire a desire to escape from the dull, grey of Puritan outpost" (Mukherjee 44). Her embroidery even shows her hidden and imaginary world, which the narrator describes as on a field of light blue, Hannah created furthestmost shoreline. Yet once more Mukherjee states, "A twelve-year old puritan orphan who had never been out of Massachusetts imagined an ocean, palm trees, . . . a ghostly white building-it could even be the Taj Mahal is rising" (Mukherjee 44). The unusual landscape that Hannah embroiders symbolizes the unusual relationship that Hannah finds possible to forge on her new foreign land. In some way Mukherjee seems to expands a historical tale of diaspora and widens the possibility for historical redrafting.

After Hannah's marriage with Gabriel Legge, she changed her name by Hannah Legge. By the time she left America 's shores, Hannah had transformed herself twice, adopting the names Fitch and Legge, and moving from the woods to Brookfield settlement to Salem, then headed for England. She reverses the immigrant trajectory retraced by Jasmine and moves out from the American frontier and back to the colonizing centre, in some ways searching or exploring her own American origins through geographic movement.

During Hannah's journey, she came to know more about the lifetime and humanity in India. The entirely different system of caste in Coromandel Coast surprised Hannah. Either one was Hindu or a Muslim categorised, either as Shia or Sunni. They may be a right hand or left-hand caste if they are Hindu. In the case of Muslims, they may be either Shia or Sunni. They entirely spoke diverse vernaculars, with their outstanding loyalty in the direction of dissimilar rulers and they pray to diverse spirits as their descendants had originated from diverse realms. Everything about Coromandel Coast aroused her wonder and she gradually built her affinity to India. She expressed her wonder thus; "The Coromandel had started something as immense as a Cyclone deep inside her body and mind" (Mukherjee 163). To a woman born and brought up in a puritan society, this is an experience of 'translation'. Her world is not so varied and not so diverse. So, she wondered that they were not unbiased Pagans and Mohammedans, nevertheless dissimilar supernatural beings and not the same means of praying to the identical work.

In India, she got little opportunity to assimilate with native people as she was compelled to confine herself in the hierarchical world of East India Company people. "The company code they lived under place inhuman limits on even routine freedom. At the same time their personal code was excess in All Things. And so, they recast themselves as capitals little pilgrims, forgotten victims of England's indifference to their sacrifice" (Mukherjee 128).

In a foreign land Gabriel Legge always left Hannah alone in their home and she finds solitude in an unfamiliar canvas with the help of Bhagmati. Hannah acquired knowledge about the beliefs of native people from Bhagmati. She told her the fragments from the Ramayana, the great Hindu Epic. Sita's Agni pariksha (Trial of Fire) emotionally touched her heart and she realized that in Indian society also a woman is not free from the purity of chastity and she has to always prove her chastity to her husband and also to the society willingly or unwillingly. This trial unrevealed to her that there is no fundamental difference between the orthodox Puritan society and the so-called Indian society.

The clashes between the hybrid cultural variants created a fragment of confusions in the protagonist. As a typical expatriate she also came across the multicultural facets of colonialism. The cultural hybridity redefines the characteristics of an individual with in an unfamiliar land. The term hybridity is generally associated with theorist Homi k. Bhabha, who explores how the formation and reformation of new cultures, as a result of colonial relations, disrupts any notion of a pure culture. This hybridization process occurs in what Bhabha refers to as the "Third Space", an interstitial site where new cultural identities are continually shaped.

Through placing Hannah in India, a country supposedly foreign to the American, Mukherjee forms new connections between characters of different cultural origins, and she assembles a comparative framework that supersedes these differences. Hannah's transformation can be found out in the following lines; "She was alert

to novelty, but her voyage was mental, interior. Getting there was important, but savouring the comparison with London or Salem, and watching her life being transformed, that was the pleasure" (Mukherjee 104). The differences between the cultures are formidable enough but they are further complicated by individual personalities. But the protagonist and her Indian maid transcend these differences and find relationships in the other culture which gives them a deep emotional fulfilment.

The loyalty and compassion between Hannah and Bhagmati provide them some sort of unification between each other. In an alien land both of them shared real friendship, Hannah renamed Bhagmati as Hester, one of her friends in Massachusetts. Bhagmati likewise renames Hannah, establishing a reciprocal relationship: "She wasn't 't Hannah anymore; she was Mukta, Bhagmati's word for pearl" (Mukherjee 271). Eventually Hannah tried to identify with Indian root of culture, where her western counterparts dominate their aggressiveness. The levels transformational journey led Hannah to another level of specification. Her journey finds out new expressions through her letters, diaries, and even her needle works. Hannah's trajectories led somehow shadows the story of Hester Prynne from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Both the stories foreshadow the testament of different individuals with same characteristics. The characters name also resembles the connection between Mukherjee's *Holder of the World* with Hawthorne's classic.

After the death of Gabriel in a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal, Hannah escaped with Bhagmati to Punpur under the protection of a Hindu Raja, Jadav Singh, who saved them from a bridge collapse. Hannah's affair with Raja Jadav Singh, a Hindu King in Muslim India, transforms her into the Salem Bibi, an amalgamated title that mixes her American and Indian selves. As his bibi, Hannah upsets the colonial power structure of white domination and imposition. Yet she manages to exoticize the relationship with the Raja, for; "it was here in India that she felt her own passionate nature for the first time, the first hint that a world beyond duty and patience and wifely service was possible, then desirable, then irresistible" (Mukherjee 237). He bids Hannah a life of boundless opportunities and luxurious wishes undreamed of in English biosphere.

Her courtship with the Raja transformed her from a Puritan woman to his white bibi and her unborn child sowed her strong affinity to India. She claimed her kinship with India thus: "I was once a respectable married English lady and look at me now-a bibi in a sari" (Mukherjee 197). But the inevitable fate follows her destiny unwantedly. Soon her Raja was murdered in a war with Aurangzeb. After his death, Hannah went back to her Puritan Salem with her daughter. In Salem, Hannah again tried to establish her existence in the margins of the Puritan community along with her mother Rebecca Easton and her daughter, Pearl. In Salem, she became a foreigner who transgresses the moral convention of orthodox Puritan society by making an extramarital relationship with a Raja. The love of Jadav Singh and her Indian religious belief provided her tremendous mental strength to face the taunts of the people of the Puritan colony "Salem, and watching her life being transformed, that was the pleasure. She did not hold India up to inspection by the lamp of England, or of Christianity" (Mukherjee 104). She proceeds to Salem as an unorthodox person existing on the borders of the social order. Hema Nair in "A Puritan in a Mughal court" admits that: "Hannah is a stunning creation, a bold mind striving for identity in strange surroundings, a timeless creature trying to survive in a rigid, in exorable defined society" (106).

Mukherjee accepts India has continuously remained a dwelling-land that certifies the differences of customs and habits. The story concludes by means of Hannah's return voyage to Salem where she finds her own mother with psychological problems but under safety. She carries her 'black' offspring Pearl Singh in addition courageously breaks into Salem completely with her mother's five half Nipmuc children, and Beigh Master's chasing the most faultless precious stone in the biosphere, which is named as the Emperor's Tear.

CONCLUSION

Bharati Mukherjee's fiction reflects her preoccupation with cultural conflicts, with the result of change, and with the influence of the past on the present. Typically, her women protagonists came across all the boundaries of cultural barriers for their fulfilment. They find out a new way out of the world to reflect themselves like a sunshine not to be a shadow. Their confrontation within the obstacles of limitations gave them power to overcome their barriers. Mukherjee has stocked her new novel with interesting notions about East and West, imperialism, the constricted natures and the larger possibilities of women and men. The writer constantly reminds us of the interconnections among cultures that have made our world and draws her reader with vigour and scrupulous attention to detail across time and space. In the novel *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee presents the expedition of Hannah and her pain and exuberance. The demanding transformation of an archetypal expatriate captures all its necessary change through Hannah. Different phases of her voyage results in her self-remoulding and that modification provides her mental strength to stand against all the obstacles that comes to defeat her. Mukherjee well portrayed the character of Hannah to reflect the extraordinary phases that a women have to undergone for her self-realization.

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