

ISSN:0976-8165

THE CRITERION

An International Journal in English



Vol. 7, Issue-I February 2016

7 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

www.the-criterion.com

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*: An Odyssey of Postcolonialism and Cultural Sensibility

Anita Goswami

Research Scholar,

Dept. of English,

H.N.B.Garhwal Central University, Srinagar

Abstract:

It is acknowledged that Bharati Mukherjee is an eminent diasporic writer of the third generation. She talks about the troubles of South Asian Women immigrants'. In her novels female protagonists are the sufferer of identity crisis and they struggle on the ground of foreign land, east to west. In her novel *The Holder of the World* we see that Hannah Easton, female protagonist of the novel, she begins her journey from west to east but she not only searches her identity but also explores the various layers of multiculturalism. This novel is woven with threads of migration, immigration, historical evidence and transformation.

The Holder of the World was published in 1993, deals with the story of a puritan woman named as Hannah Easton of seventeenth century. Later on she is known as 'Salem Bibi' an immigrant from America, who comes to India, absorbs herself in the Indian culture. Later on she becomes the mistress of Indian King Raja Singh Jadav. The novel also moves around the tale of the Emperor's Tear, the diamond which Aurangzeb hung in his war tent and which was stolen by Salem Bibi, hidden in the dying womb of Bhagmati; companion of Salem Bibi. But history loses the diamond. In the mid of twentieth century Beigh Masters and her cyber friend Venn Iyer of MIT disclose the secret of the lost Diamond.

The present paper tries to explore the condition of Women in colonial India and America.

Keywords: Immigrants, Migration, transformation, Multiculturalism, colonize.

The term "Postcolonial" is chiefly used in the reference of writing/ culture of the nations/ peoples/cultures who were once colonized by European powers. The term "Postcolonial literature" now replaces the traditional category of "Commonwealth literature" or "Third World literature." There are several discourses of Postcolonial writings like: immigration, migration, feminization, marginalization, and dehumanization of native, quest for identity, pre-historic and post-historic evidences. This is an era of "globalizing spread" (Meenakshi Mukherjee 3). Postcolonialism is a vast project of decolonization of mind and spirit. Including all these terms only one word will be enough to say that is Diaspora. Diaspora is the prominent issue of the Postcolonial literature. Diasporic literature explores the procedure of adaptation, resistance, nostalgia, cultural displacement, rootlessness and belongingness.

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the renowned South Asian women novelists. As a Post-colonial writer she has written many extensive novels related to the problems women covering an extraordinary range of immigrant's issues. Her novel *The Holder of the World* (1993) is a famous novel of cultural displacement, in which she has portrayed the picture of colonial India

on the background of Mughal India. Through this novel she focuses upon the strategy of multiculturalism and assimilation.

The Holder of the World deals with the story of Hannah Easton consisting the two plots, main- plot and the sub- plot. Main plot describes the story of Hannah Easton, a Puritan woman, brought up at Salem in Massachusetts, an immigrant from America and became the mistress of Indian King Raja Jadav Singh known as 'Salem Bibi.' Mukherjee has tried to connect past with present. The sub-plot begins with the exploration of the lost diamond of the great Mughal king Aurangzeb which was famous as the 'The Emperor's Tear' and it was stolen during the battle against Raja Jadav Singh, the Hindu lover of the seventeenth century of puritan Hannah Easton.

This secret is disclosed by Beigh Mistress and his cyber boyfriend Venn Iyer MIT engineer; both are the dealers of the past things, to know the reality of Hannah Easton. Both of the traveller search thousands of books and antiquity of historical records and paintings. This opening sentence of the novel reflects the importance of time factor in the development of the plot. *The Holder of the World* deals with theme of Puritan Lady Hannah Easton, from America who comes to India in seventeenth century and as 'Salem Bibi.' By birth Hannah is puritan when she is young, her father dies and mother Rebecca elopes with Nipmuc lover. Later on she is adopted by Robert and Susannah Fitch in Salem. She marries to Gabriel Legg who is employed in East India Company as a factor, sails for the Coromandel Coast.

Hannah neither forgets nor forgives her mother's crime of elopement. She never shares her emotional tumult with anyone. In the Puritan family circle of Fitch she could never imagine to talk of her mother. Hannah's fate brings her to India, her marriage with Gabriel knowing that he is unworthy to her but she accepts her because she wants to free from conservative and claustrophobic world. After the death of Gabriel Hannah comes across Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad resulting in a rather passionate relationship. Hannah relishes her new identity as Bibi. Like Jasmine in Hannah too, we witness a strong element of adoptability.

Nawab Haider Beg, Governor of Aurangzeb's state, dispatched Morad Farah, the ruthless mercenary commander to crush and imprison, Raja Jadav Singh, to usurp the Emperor's Tear, the diamond and to bring the Fringai Lady Hannah. On getting the news of his enemy's attack on

Devgadh, Hannah and Bhagmati are sent into one palanquin and a disguised Raja bundles himself into another one. Raja Jadav Singh attacks the Mughal army and injures badly. Meanwhile killing Morad Hannah saves the life of Raja and brings back to him fort Panpur.

On the other hand Hannah goes in the court of Emperor Aurangzeb to stop the war and maintain peace in the kingdom but the emperor is full of arrogance and hate. He does not listen the plea of Hannah. At last violence spreads out and Raja dies. Hannah fails to pacify Aurangzeb. She plans to carry diamond out of Aurangzeb's war tent and escapes towards Panpur fort. She gives diamond to Bhagmati, which she thrusts into her dying womb and thus, precious diamond safe with her dead body. After this Hannah pays her tribute to Bhagmati burying her under the name of her English lover, whom she had loved passionately. Lastly Hannah returns to Salem, as a transformed human being, living as a rebel with her daughter from Raja and five children of her mother Rebecca from her Nipmuc lover. In this way , the story of 'Salem Bibi'

that is Hannah Easton is disclosed to us and Beigh Master is able to get the Emperor's Tear, the most perfect diamond in the world.

In fact the life's story of Hannah Easton is similar to the life's incidents of Hester Prynne, the main protagonist of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne:

Historical evidence that brings a remote connection between Salem Bibi's Indian experience and the writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne's morbid introspection into guilt and repression in his now famous books harks back to the need for openness and understanding already stressed in the story of Salem Bibi (Parasuram 201).

Hannah Easton and Prynne both depict the duplicity of the puritan society of Salem, Massachusetts, America of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth century. Both are expert in embroidery work to hide their monotony of puritan orthodoxy. Both commit adultery having the fairer sex which is considered immoral and unconventional in puritan society, having illegitimate children. Hannah and Hester both are 'outsiders' in their communities. They leave their native places to adjust in the new world. About her women characters Mukherjee stated:

The kinds of women I write about... are those who are adoptable. We've all been raised to please, been trained to be adaptable as wives, And that adaptability is working to the women's advantage when we come over as immigrants. (Iowa Interview).

This novel is in the form of modern biographical fiction. Hannah Easton is an embodiment of courage, imagination and assertiveness which is part and parcel of American spirit. A woman is a woman whether she is Indian or American; it is her mental makeup that counts.

Hannah emerges as a woman who is inquisitive, vital and intensely aware of her own sense of self and purpose. Coming to India was more of a voyage inward and she enjoyed watching her life transformed. So magically entranced is she by India that she easily forgets her old world. India offers a life of limitless possibilities and sensuous pleasures which Hannah could not even dream of in the seventeenth century European world. After the death of Raja Jadav Singh Hannah's encounters with Emperor Aurangzeb matures her experiences as one who has come to explore the mysterious East. She feels that war only brings destruction and bloodshed on a large scale, so in her defense she presents an example of fine oratory which based on the theme of how war ravages the innocent people:

Duty! Duty, judgment! I have heard enough of duty. And of judgment. You clack your lust for vengeance and for gold and diamonds in the words of duty and judgment and protection and sacrifice. But it is the weakest and poorest and most innocent who suffer, who sacrifice, whose every minute of every day is obedience to duty (269).

Despite her efforts, she fails to make alliance between the Emperor and the Raja, yet she succeeds in serving the purpose of the writer, who has used Hannah as a peace maker, condemning war and violence. Hannah appears as a visionary striving for peace and propagating

the message of Universal brotherhood. In Mukherjee's worlds: The life inside her compelled it, she would offer her life, if necessary, to end the war" (HW 259).

Just as Jasmine adapts herself to the Western lifestyle similarly Hannah finds great contentment and joy in her adapted land, India. Bharati Mukherjee describes *The Holder of the World*, as a "Post-modern historical novel." When Hannah transports herself from place to place, city to city it is interesting to follow her mental journey as well. Her whole personality undergoes a change a change as she moves in and out of places physically. Hannah succeeds in burying her past as a native of Puritan England and emerges as a real fighter for life:

The Holder of the World is a novel of expatriation, of a quest and a journey, not only to geographically diverse lands but culturally variant societies which help to questioning and discovering new ways essentially orthodox (Sandhya 195).

The story of *The Holder of the World* is assimilated with three cultures—Christian, Muslim and Hindu. Hannah, a Christian says to Aurangzeb: "They are not Devgad people or Roorpconda people, not Hindu people or Muslim people, not Sunni or Shia, priests or untouchables, servants or kings. If all is equal in the eyes of Brahma as the Hindu say, if Allah is all-seeing and all-merciful as you say, then who committed atrocities on the children, the women, and the old people? Who has poisoned the hearts of men?" (268) unfortunately, by their nature, birth and nourishment, three cultures do not join together.

The title of the novel, *The Holder of the World*, is after the name of Aurangzeb, who was also called Alamgir in Urdu and the World-Holder in English. Hannah journey to Mughal India is similar to the journey of Bharati Mukherjee to the USA. The Mughal India, at the time of Aurangzeb, was a land of the Tajmahal, thrill, adventure, gold and jewellery. On the other hand, the colonial and puritan Massachusetts, in 1960, had no "paintings, no inlays of rubies and pearls. Our men wore animal skins or jerkins of crude muslins and our women's virtue was guarded by bonnets and caps full skirts." (H.W12.) When Mukherjee was born in colonial India, almost three hundred years later, she must have found the reversal of old picture of India and America. The Mughal India, of the time of Aurangzeb, is now modern USA, of Regan and Bush and colonial India, of her time, is the colonial America of Hannah. When Mukherjee saw a miniature at an auction of Sotheby in New York titled 'A European Woman in Aurangzeb's Court, she naturally felt connection. Now, it is 'An Indian Woman in the USA' History repeats itself.

The Holder of the World is a complex novel with greater depth of meaning, revealing the interconnectedness between cultures and lands. It has accurately judged the use of history in *The Holder of the World* as history is commonly used in Postcolonial texts because they deal with one's search for past identity and in *The Holder of the World* this hunger for connectivity through past is clearly shown. The novel itself acts as a bridge between different time zones simultaneously, and I don't mean Eastern, central and Pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future" (HW5). This opening sentence of the novel reflects the importance of time factor in the development of the plot. It can be taken as:

The attempt of the writer Bharati Mukherjee to look at the past in the present to preserve it for the future through the super computer. The novel should be acclaimed for research and artistic recapturing of the past reality, not retrieval of information (Sudheer 213).

Mukherjee has herself considered that the task of probing into history of three hundred year's old period, its people, their style and experience is like "uniting people possessions: it's like matching orphaned shocks, through time" (HD5).

By the time of Jasmine, however, Bharati Mukherjee's concept of expatriation undergoes a dramatic transformation, making the journey westward not only an impulsive decision taken purely on material considerations but a deeper, far-reaching journey of an individual quest of a meaning, a purpose and an identity in life. Jasmine of an individual in quest of a meaning, a purpose and an identity in life. Jasmine traces the life of Jyoti from a small town in Punjab to Iowa as a journey of human mind. Jasmine starts her journey from east to west while Hannah begins east to west. Hannah like Jasmine becomes an expatriate as a result of a quest for a vital life of feeling and emotions.

Like other women in Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine and Hannah are women of energy and boundless hope. They escape from old world is largely the result of, not only embracing new, positive values but an attempt to escape from the limitations and claustrophobic influence of the native world. Bharati Mukherjee tries to give true picture of early British India. According to Venn the main purpose of British advent in India is neither to breed nor to colonize but to convert, to plunder, and to enrich themselves. She throws light on superstitions, widow marriage, sati, practice and the attempts on the part of the rulers to thwart any attempt to promote Hindu-Muslim unity.

Bharati Mukherjee presents the expatriate outlook towards Hindu mythology, idolatry, Indian history, its people and their psychology Hannah looks at the idolatry of Hindus as a form of primitivism. Mukherjee's character portrayal is remarkable, particularly that of Hannah and Bhagmati. Hannah with her dynamic beauty is called as precious as pearls by the emperor, but at the end she before the readers as a philosopher with her message of, condemnation of idolatry, equality and equanimity. Bhagmati, her servant maid, appears to be enigmatic to Hannah herself. The novel has got some forays into the mythological world. Sita's captivity in Lanka by the multi-headed monster Ravana has got a mythological significance in the novel. The narrative style of Bhagmati in detailing the *Ramayana* to Hannah reveals what a mythological text means to Indians.

The Protagonist of *The Holder of the World* and Debby Di Martino of *Leave It to Me* are Americans and association with India. Through her novels Mukherjee has tried to depict numerous aspects of cultural dislocation and relocation from different proportions that from the external perspective. How an outsider reacts towards dislocation, alienation and efforts made for relocation. Though both the novels discuss the similar constant theme search for identity yet they differ in respect of their subject matter. If *The Holder of the World* is a striking unification of Eastern and Western culture, *Leave It to Me* appears as a quest of restless and perplexed soul resulting in disaster and chaos. The aim of the writer is to justify that both the Journey as well as destination is important. The encounter between the native outsider in search of self and how far

she is influenced and transformed by this cultural synthesis has become the main purpose of the writer.

With the publication of *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee has the genius as a writer, historian, and feminist who excels in using history, time and space for the creation and designing of *The Holder of the World*:

The novel has a wide canvas that sweeps across continents and centuries, cultures and religions. Immigration, exile alienation and screwing lands have always been the colour of Mukherjee's Palate and with *The Holder of the World*, she uses the familiar tones and shades to create a Universe of infinite possibility and eternal time (Satter 6).

With the use of history and imagination, the meeting between the puritan Seventeenth Century and early Eighteenth century American world and the Mughal Indian world of Eighteenth century takes place. In this way recurring themes of dislocation, migration and transformation are skillfully used by Mukherjee. Instead of clash with this idea, a new dimension has been added to the novel by showing what effect it made on two different, contemporary cultures when they come into contact with each other. *The Holder of the World* is a story of an immigrant American Hannah Easton, who comes to India in seventeenth century and finds herself, absorbed in its culture. Indeed Hannah Easton, the real Holder of the World, who realizes this secret that, "the survivor is one who improvises, not follows, the rules" (HW234).

Like Jasmine Hannah's life begins a true journey and she achieves a new identity wherever she goes. She converts herself entirely without trailing all the connections with the past. She was born as Hannah Easton, brought up as Hannah Fitch, re-named as Hannah Legge after her marriage, becomes Salem Bibi and finally Mukta. She faced all the oddities and difficulties, but finally struggles through them and came out as a winner. The novel very directly explores the intimate and domestic life of a woman, Hannah Easton, who has been exposed to various adversities, but carried the spirit and the desire to come out as a survivor. The story also spreads out that it is not the culture, but the psyche of a woman, who is not responsible for the type of life she leads. victims of various situations, but at last Hannah appears before us self-Here, we have Hannah Easton, who breaks every shell, she becomes the actualized character, living and leading her life on her own term and condition.

Works Cited:

Iwoa Review 20, 3(1990), p.18.

Mukherjee, Bharati. "On Being American Writer". *Writers on America: 15 reflections*. usa. Usembassay.de/Mukherjee. htm.

_____. *The Holder of the World*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 1993. Print.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Interrogating Post-Colonialism: Theory, Text and Context. Eds. Harish Trivedi and Meenakshi Mukherjee. Shimla : Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1996.3-36. Print.

_____. *Leave It to Me*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1997. Print.

- Parasuram, Laxmi. “*Holding the colliding Walls: Cross–Cultural Perception in The Holder of the World. The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee*.” Ed. R.K. Dhawan. Delhi: Prestige, 1996.196-201. Print.
- Satter, Arisha. “A Review of *The Holder of the World*”. The Sunday Times.20 March, 1994. Print.
- Sudheer, V.C. “*History and the past Reality in The Holder of the World. The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee*.” Op. Cit. 213-216. Print.