



## **UNSETTLING RECOLLECTIONS: PROTAGONIST HANNAH EASTON'S PSYCHE IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S THE HOLDER OF THE WORLD - A STUDY**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper examines the distressing memories of Hannah portrayed in Bharati Mukherjee's novel, "The Holder of the World," within the context of feminism. Hannah Easton's journey begins from Puritan Salem to England, colonial India, and back to America. Bharati Mukherjee intricately blends classical texts like the story of Sita from the Hindu Ramayana into the narrative. Hannah's comparison of herself to Sita, both being outsiders facing choices between hostile environments and new opportunities, is noted. Jadav Singh's questioning of Hannah's adherence, similar to Ram's doubts about Sita, adds depth to the exploration of loyalty in the novel.

**Key Words:** Hannah, Psyche, Colonial & Oppressive.

### **Introduction:**

Bharati Mukherjee crafts authentic female characters and their psyche imbued with recognizable qualities, delving into their trials, aspirations, failures, and complexities with subtlety. She doesn't see her novels as a battleground between men and women. So, labelling her work through the lens of militant Western feminism would be unfair. Her novels explore women's quests for self-discovery, understanding the female psyche, and unravelling life's mysteries. "Holder of the World" primarily focuses on Hannah Easton, a white woman striving to find meaning in her life by seeking inspiration from the past and direction for the future.

Inspired by a seventeenth-century Mughal painting featuring a white woman in Mughal court attire being auctioned in New York, Bharati Mukherjee started on writing "The Holder of the World." She elaborates that her novels aim to mirror the complexity of Mughal artwork by giving equal importance to all the characters and interweaving multiple narratives that are intricately linked. By diving into the challenging histories of both America and India, Bharati Mukherjee connects the seemingly disparate literary traditions of both countries through the influence of western culture. She reshapes the concept of American exceptionalism by acknowledging India's enlightening perspective beyond England's colonial influence and pointing out its equally significant role.

### **The Role of Psyche and Distressing Memories:**

"The Holder of the World" (1993) is a novel that explores the tumultuous blend of chaos and joy that comes from the fusion of two cultures. It follows the journey of Hannah Easton, a white woman who ventures to India in the seventeenth century. Hannah represents the essence of courage, creativity, and audacity inherent in the American spirit. Orphaned after her mother elopes with her Nipmuc lover, Hannah is taken in by the conservative Robert and Susannah Fitch of Salem, where she is brought up in a traditional Puritan environment. Despite losing her mother at a young age, Hannah carries haunting memories of her, particularly of a night when her mother sang psalms with a strong, sweet voice. Another memory she'd rather forget is her mother's elopement, witnessing her fall from grace. Throughout it all, Hannah discovers a profound love for needlework, a skill that becomes a defining aspect of her character. "The innocent lives in an unfilled world, a green Eden where life is sweet and all one's needs are met in an atmosphere of care and love, whereas the Orphan is a disappointed idealist ... the greater the ideals about the world the worse reality" (HW 27).

Agreeing to marry Gabriel Legge, a pirate and seafarer, Hannah envisions liberation from a stifling society. However, her married life in London fails to provide the companionship she craves. Gabriel lacks the sensitivity and patience to truly listen to Hannah; he epitomizes self-centeredness. Hannah, a woman of consciousness, yearns to discover her true identity. She feels lonely and eventually becomes estranged, enduring the oppressive confines of confinement. Hannah ventures to India and becomes involved with several Indian lovers, highlighting the struggles of immigrant women striving for autonomy. The novel brings a broader perspective by using women characters to examine the relationships between diverse cultures. Hannah's journey to the East filled with images of adventure, action, and passion, symbolizes an escape from the rigid confines of Puritan society. Her decision to marry Gabriel Legge is driven by her desire for freedom from societal

constraints. Following Gabriel's death, she encounters Raja Jadav Singh, leading to an unexpected passionate relationship.

#### **The Hegemonic Traditions of Hindu Culture:**

"The Holder of the World" often draws from Indian epics, incorporating allusions to iconic characters such as Rama, Sita, and Ravana. The influence of Buddhism has significantly shaped Indian literature, and Bharathi Mukherjee's fiction reflects this influence. Sita's tale, preserved through oral tradition, serves as an ideal of womanhood and marital dynamics for many, including Hannah. Mukherjee uses Sita's narrative to assimilate Hannah into Indian culture. However, Hannah struggles to reconcile her own experiences of displacement and sexuality with Sita's ordeal of being abducted by Ravana and fearing rape.

Hannah, like her mother Rebecca, crosses racial lines when Jadav Singh rescues her. She also takes a lover from a different culture, breaking colonial laws that say white women can't live with native people. While Sita was later rejected due to the public's perception of her lack of chastity, Bhagmati managed to survive by becoming an English factors mistress after being raped and immediately disowned by her family. One significant difference between Sita, Hannah, and Bhagmati is that neither Hannah nor Bhagmati abstained from sexual relationships that were prohibited whereas in patriarchal Hindu culture, the mythical Sita's chastity is a prevalent cultural representation of the ideal womanhood. It serves as a reminder that the true Holders of the World are those who do not compete with other groups for supremacy. Hannah's life fills in as a chance for self acknowledgment by Beigh and Venn. Beigh clarifies, "Together and separately we remember what happened to Hannah Easton Fitch Legge aka the Bibi from Salem so that we may predict what will happen to us within our lifetime" (HW 91).

Hannah decides to leave Coromandel for London as soon as she comes to know about Gabriel's infidelity. During the journey because of the startling weighty breeze, the boat turns and fortunately Hannah figures out how to make due with the assistance of her companion cum worker servant Bhagmati. Finally, the king of Devgad, Raja Jadav Singh, invites them to stay with him. Hannah abandons all morality and expectations of a traditional relationship when she falls in love with Raja Jadav Singh and accepts the role of his bride-to-be. Jadav Singh offers Hannah an existence of boundless potential outcomes, of enthusiasm and erotic delights undreamt of in the world of English. She was thrilled about her new relationship because oriental love makes her feel more vulnerable. She knows about the change of her mindset, her entire character. The choice is the most important difference between Hannah and Bhagmati. Hannah chooses to defy social norms regarding interracial relationships and the power of women to choose their sexual partners, whereas Bhagmati's rape empowers her in a culture that values virginity and chastity. In order to reconcile and comprehend their individual experiences as women, Bhagmati and Hannah appropriate and adapt Sita's story. When Bhagmati recounts Sita's story, Hannah wonders about Sita's own version of the events, which she finds intriguing in its absence. However, the difference in their narration and appropriation of Sita's story suggests that identity formation for a native woman and an immigrant woman is different due to cultural location.

#### **Hinduism: Entering into a New Spiritual Space:**

Gabriel believed that Hannah should get over her Puritan sensibilities and she obliged him, since she cherished things of life. Legge joins a group of pirates and separates from his wife during one of his mishaps with Haj pilgrims. Bhagmati and Hanna make their way to Panpur, where they are sheltered by Raja Jadav Singh of Devgad. Bhagmati and Hannah are made Raja's guests. She enters a brand-new Hinduism world. She was attracted to Jadav Singh. Jadav Singh frees the diamond, the Emperor's tear, and brings Hannah, the firangi lady, after the Nawab Haider Beg sends his most ruthless commander, Moradfarah, to cage Raja. Jadav Singh with no choice packaged Hannah and Bhagmati into a cart and a hidden Raja into another. The Raja attacked the Mughal army as they travelled to the Nawab. Hannah and Bhagmati are taken to Devgad by Jadav Singh, who packs them into a palanquin with a servant dressed in royal Jama and poses as Devgad's Lion King. Around then Bhagmati holds out the Raja's blade and gives it to Hannah. They discover Raja Jadav Singh dead next to his white horse. Seeing his condition, Hannah becomes fierce and pushes the knife into MoradFarah's uncovered tissue. Raja survives thanks to Hannah, but he only has one arm. She has the vitality to fight and overcome obstacles thanks to the strong warrior archetype. Finally life inside her urges her to offer her life to end the conflict. She and Bhagmati enter the mysterious section in the kid queen's royal residence in Devgad, She ruffled into the conflict camp with Bhagmati, requesting and hoping to get a crowd of people with the Ruler immediately so she could liberate the two hero lords from their pointless fixation. Pearson observes: "The Warrior also helps us to speak out and to fight for what nourishes our minds, our hearts, and our souls and to vanquish those things that sap and deplete the human spirit by speaking the truth about them and by refusing to countenance them or to allow them into our lives" (HW 75).

After burying her puritanical past, Hannah Easton emerges as a real fighter for life. The affection she receives from Raja Jadav Singh makes her crazy and trying. She can now confront the "holder of the worl," the Alamgir the incomparable Mughal Ruler Aurangazeb, with boldness and certainty. This is a choice for life and against despair: to care, even if it means sacrificing oneself. She is arguing before the sovereign to stop the conflict against her sweetheart. "I have come late in my life to the feeling of love. Love for a man, love for a

place, love for a people. They are not Devgad people or Roorconda people, not Hindu people or Muslim people, not Sunni or Shia, priests or untouchables, servants or Kings. If all is equal in the eye of Brahma as the Hindus say, if Allah is all-seeing and all-merciful as you say, then who has committed atrocities on the children, the women, the old people? Who has poisoned the heart of men?" (HW 268).

Hannah in the long run kills Morad saves Jadav's life and takes him back to Panpur. She decides to sacrifice her life to end the war and goes to deal with the Emperor, but he takes her hostage. She is reminded of Ravana, the Muslim Ravana, the Lankan demon king, whenever Aurangzeb visits her. She steals the diamond known as the Emperor's Tear, even though her mission to negotiate an armistice between the Raja and the Emperor was unsuccessful. She gives up the precious stone to Bhagmati. The precious stone is eventually found by Beigh Bosses in a cyber spatial finale. The most famous diamond in the world is inserted into Bhagmati's dying womb. It is in her grave that they track down the holder of the universe of the seventeenth hundred years. Hannah Easton sheds her puritanical past to become a real fighter of living. The affection she gets from Raja Jadav Singh makes her wild and trying. She makes a great friend in Bhagmati, her Indian ayah, who gives her a glimpse into an ancient civilization. She describes sections from "The Ramayana". She is drawn to Sita's life because she goes through a trial by fire to show her purity to her husband and her society. She is carried away unharmed by Agni, the God of Fire. A fascinating equal is that Hannah's life was likewise an intense test time. Bhagmati, too, refuses to fully identify with Sita because she herself was raped and kicked out of her family but still manages to survive on her own without the help of a Rama figure.

#### **A Flying Back:**

As a result, Bharati Mukherjee portrays her characters as survivors who successfully endure physical and emotional torture and speak out against the brutalities and violence that surround them. As a result, she encourages women to be independent and assertive. Hannah goes through a course of resurrection all through these movements and, believes herself to be an attendant of others. She adopts multiple identities and names. Hannah's naming permits her to change herself without completely losing her associations with her past selves. Hannah is conceived Hannah Fitch and becomes Hannah Legge who in the long run turns into the Salem Bibi and Valuable as Pearl. The job of attendant permits each person to start positive change in other as the identity of the individual is altered by reincarnation. Hannah shows a capability of adjusting her need to secure her new selves in India with the craving to employ a cultivating impact. Mukherjee's female characters live in a society where women were encouraged by independence to shed their veil, which covered all of their mental abilities and achievements. They had chosen to move out of the four walls and go into the world with another certainty and assurance.

Nevertheless, they needed to confront a great deal of obstacles, made by men as well as by different ladies. There were a ton of activities and responses. Bharati Mukherjee, who has written fiction that, addresses the issues and feelings of women. They have communicated the sensations of ladies and their battle for presence in the public eye. Her novels explore the personal, social, and historical dramas of moving to a new place and adjusting to a new way of life. Her portrayal of ladies and their various connections depicts the dominance of patriarchal practices in traditional society, in addition to the options available to women in their situation for liberation and empowerment. In a world that was mostly orthodox, Hannah's life succeeds in questioning and discovering new ways to define reality. The story comes to a close with Hannah's return trip to Salem, where she finds her mother in a mental institution, raises her "black" daughter Pearl Singh, and bravely lives in Salem with her mother's five half-Nipmuc children her entire life. During her erratic moves from Salem to Stepney, Coromandel to Devgad, and then back to Salem, her entire personality undergoes a radical transformation, even though the story concludes in the same way.

#### **Conclusion:**

The novel *The Holder of the World* provides an intimate and domestic account of women's subtly oppressive conditions before self-knowledge can be achieved. It is the narrative of the individual journey and its consequences as depicted in the book. The enduring of the courageous woman is brought to the front and the reason for which is driving her to emerge from the shell, she has decided to experience such an extremely long time. Bharati Mukherjee continually makes characters that are not faultless animals but rather are troubled, estranged casualties. But unlike the characters in absurd literature, her victim-protagonists in her fiction have the strength to overcome their shame and flaws and find the values they need to live their lives to the full. Her belief that human greatness should be revealed by the power of the imagination is reflected in the shaping of these characters.

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