

Tribhuvan University

Cultural Resistance in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride*

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By

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### **Abstract**

This research work aims to depict the resistance against western cultural imperialism in Bharati Mukherje's *The Tree Bride*. The text is a story of Tara Chatterjee, the protagonist as well as the narrator of the novel. Tara Chatterjee lives in America but she is shaped according to ancient Indian myths, customs, traditions and she is highly influenced by the role of myths and legends on the formation of her cultural identity. She, in search of her cultural heritage, roots and identity comes back to India and writes a book about the historical legends of Mistigunj, Tara Lata (The Tree Bride). Through the story of Tara Lata, the protagonist uncovers the values of eastern cultures and rituals as well as challenges the western imperialism since Tara Lata was a freedom fighter during the India Independent Movement. Bharati Mukherjee tries to depict the resistance against the cultural imperialism of the west by evoking the history of ancient Bengal during the colonization in connection with focus on the legend of Independence like Tara Lata. The story of Tara Lata reflects the cultural and historical significance of the native Indians and Mukherjee brings the issue of the representation of her culture as her identity and resistance against the cultural imperialism of west.

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### **I: Introducing *The Tree Bride* and Cultural Resistance**

This research is based on Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride*, a story of Tara Chatterjee, the protagonist as well as the narrator of the novel. In particular, this research work tries to depict the protagonist Tara Chatterjee who is shaped according to ancient Indian myths, customs, traditions and highly influenced by the role of myths and legends on the formation of cultural identity and heritage of the people from the third world people; Bharati Murkherjee tries to depict the resistance against the cultural imperialism of the west through the cultural awareness of self.

*The Tree Bride* represents the history of Mishtigunj, a Bengali village with the flash back narration of its protagonist Tara Chatterjee who has been living in America but is from Bengali cultural heritage. Through her quest of her past cultural heritage, Tara Chatterjee brings the text to the hundred years back. The text could reveal about the historical facts of colonization, Hindu rituals and religion, social and cultural background of Mishtigunj during colonization. The events and incidents about Indian Independence Movement bring the significance of the legends the Independent movement as the medium of resistance against western imperialism. The story of the historical legends Tara Ma and John Mist counters the colonial notion of superiority.

Tara Chatterjee a woman living in San Francisco is from the Bengali heritage, who is shaped according to ancient Indian myths, customs, traditions and highly influenced by the role of myths and legends of Indian society as well as believes upon the marriage system and smooth relationship between couple in Indian society. Furthermore, she is highly inspired by freedom fighter Tara Lata who had married with a tree after the death of her child bridegroom at the age of five. The politics of picking the story from San Francisco to Bengal by focusing and

valorizing the Indian rituals and tradition is Mukherjee's cultural awareness as well as a challenge against the cultural imperialism of west.

The text begins as Tara Chatterjee's San Francisco house is firebombed by a man obsessed with killing her, and trails back to her legendary great-great-aunt and namesake, Tara Lata, who was born in 1874 and, at five, married to a tree because her fiance died. Mukherjee reveals later that Tara Lata bravely conspired to win Bengal's independence from England. The narrator gradually discovers why her namesake died in prison. She uncovers much evidence of the British rulers' contempt for the Indians they claimed that they were 'civilizing,' but the narrator brings their cruelty, bigotry and duplicity into the narrative as the resistance against western cultural imperialism.

The text reveals the story of colonial resistance by Bangladeshi people on one hand; through the legend of Tara Lata it reveals the ancient place Mishtigunj evoking the Hindu culture, rituals and spirituality of contemporary time and space. It includes these cultural rituals, artifacts, and identity to challenge the colonial mentality of cultural imperialists by valorizing the eastern legends and culture upon western. From the same cultural awareness, Tara Chatterjee gets the resolution from her ups and down relationship with her husband because of her name sake Tara Lata's wedding resonates in miraculous interactions over the generations which is haunting the people from Indian civilization as a medium of glorification. In this regard Mukherjee writes:

Marriage had not been part of the same hierarchy of obligation. Marriage was something done once and for all time to satisfy everyone's expectations, then put aside. Marriage was self- sustaining, the way our grandparents' had been. But those are the Indian assumptions, not American. (17- 18)

Here, Mukherjee not only refers the definition of marriage of Hindu community but also regards as a rich cultural rituals, which bears no hierarchy between male and female. The ritualistic marriage of Hindu community has less chance of divorce and separation unlike in western society. Thus, Mukherjee has resisted against the western cultural imperialism by emphasizing the eastern rituals and cultures. Mukherjee further asserts, “Marriage is bigger than the participants” (32) in Hindu community valorizing self cultural artifacts as opposition of western norms and value.

The westerners always try to impose their norms and values on the people of non- west. They have the colonial mentality. In the period of colonization they had the tendency of imperial colonization by capturing the large territory of foreign land. But, in the phase of post colonization, they aim to colonize the world by imposing their cultures, thoughts, tendencies as well as norms and values. They aim to create the universalism in the issue of culture by hegeomonizing the rest of the world out of the west. The cultural imperialism functions through their superior mentality. In this regard, Lois Tyson writes:

Colonialist ideology was based on the colonizers assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of indigenous people, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded. The colonizers believed that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized sophisticated, or as Post Colonial critics put it metropolitan. (366)

Native people are defined as savage, backward and undeveloped because their technology are highly advanced and they ignore or sweep aside the religions customs and codes of behavior of the people they subjugated. So the colonizers see themselves at the centers of the world; the



colonized are at the margins. The above idea also takes it granted that European culture becomes the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted.

In cultural imperialism, European culture up as standard for all humankind and other culture is today called Eurocentric. A common instance of Eurocentricism is the philosophy of so called universalism. British European and later, American cultural standard-bears judged all literature in terms of its universality. It means that literary text had to be of the universal themes and characters and judged on the standard of European literature. Universalism gave rise to European cultural superiority, too. The term 'other' provides the colonized subject with a sense of their identity as somebody dependent, and secondary. In this way subjectivity of the colonized is continually showed in the gaze of the imperial other that ultimately aims to colonize the native.

It is the period of colonization when the westerners used to create certain assumptions about natives. Knowing the natives and ruling them was the framework of any colonialism. In the post colonial period, the authors from the former colonies are able to write their own literature resisting against the superior mentality of west. This research aims to denote that how Bharati Mukherjee has resisted against this mentality of cultural imperialism through out the text *The Tree Bride*.

*The Tree Bride* on one hand portrays the Indian blooded female as its protagonist. On the other hand, she is highly inspired by religious values, marries values as well female cultures, mentality and values of Hindu community. Furthermore, she believes on the legend of Tara Lata who had married to a tree as her husband because her child fiancé had died at the age of five. Later she had involved in freedom fight against British imperialism. About Tara Lata's contribution to independence movement, Mukherjee writes:

Freed of any family obligation, she spent the next sixty years inside her father's compound, learning to read and write Bengali and English, then teaching and finally organizing and protesting. Every manner of protester and activist came to visit: Mahatma Gandhi the pacifist and Netaji Subhas Bose the militant, American friends of India, Sikh separatists from California, vegetarians and theosophists, Sufis and freethinkers, authors and photographers. (33)

Though being a child widow; Tara Lata is able to transform her power to revolt against British colonization involving herself in the independence movement. Keeping these factors in consideration, this work of dissertation tries to explore the role of cultural heritages, myths and legend to resist against cultural imperialism of West in the text *The Tree Bride*. For example, Tara Chatterjee after knowing the religious and political life of her namesake Tara Lata plans reunited with her husband though she is living in America and they are going to divorce.

The research deals with the consciousness of own myths, culture, legend and ancestry connecting how Tara Chatterjee keeping her faith on her eastern cultures and contribution of her legend in social welfare feels solace from her ups and down relationship with her husband. Third, it focuses on the role of cultural heritages, myths and legend to resist against cultural imperialism of West in *The Tree Bride*. The same awareness of the cultural identity is passing through generation to generation captured in the text by Bharati Mukherjee as valorizing the heritage, Mukherjee writes, "I believe it was Faulkner who said the past isn't past. The past isn't even dead" (29).

Influence of one's myths, rituals and legend upon Tara Chatterjee is analyzed through the perspective of post colonial cultural awareness. Tara Chatterjee's iconic legend Tara Lata not only follows the Indian rituals by getting married with tree at the age of five while her child

fiancé died but also involves in freedom fight movement against British imperialism. Through this point this research traces the significance of ritual on the formation of literature written by the author living aboard as a Diaspora writer as well as their consciousness for post colonial awareness and the medium of resistance against cultural imperialism.

The research work makes an attempt to denote the resistance against the cultural imperialism in *The Tree Bride* evoking the various issues inherent in the text. Tara Chatterjee after divorce with her husband feels identity less and rootless in American society. In search of the roots and cultural heritage she returns back to Calcutta with the intention to write about her namesake Tara Lata. The story of Tara Lata (the Tree Bride) unfolds the mystery and history of her ancient heritage Mishtigunj as well as another legend John Mist, the place is named after his name.

Actually John Mist is an English man, who was born in London and raised as an orphan. In his childhood he arrives in India, adopts Bengali lifestyle, culture and civilization; opposes the English cloths, language and colonial operation in Mishtigunj. Thus, all the effort made by John Mist refers to the cultural superiority of East to West. John Mist is hanged by British officials. So, he becomes historical legends as well as inspiration of the Tree Bride. The legend of John Mist is too a medium of resistance against cultural imperialism of west in *The Tree Bride*.

The primary purpose of study is to bring the role of rituals and legends on the identity formation of the people from post colonial nations. For this purpose this research work has brought the text *The Tree Bride* in to the dimension of this study. The research aims to bring the cultural awareness of protagonist Tara Chaterjee as well as her devotion upon Indian myths, rituals and legends and marriage system as a powerful medium to resist against colonial superiority in post colonial nation and people.

In the novel *The Tree Bride*, the author has fused history, mysticism, treachery and enduring love in a suspenseful story about the lingering effects of past secrets. Tara Chatterjee, the protagonist of the novel narrates the story. The plot itself is convoluted in a suspenseful way while Tara Lata's wedding with tree resonates in miraculous interactions over the generations as a cultural heritage and identity. Similarly, her devotion to Gandhi's Salt March Movement establishes her as a national legend. Again, Mukherjee brings another historical legend John Mist, the founder of Mishtigunj who has a great impact upon Tara Lata's consciousness of nationalism.

In piecing together her ancestor's transformation from a docile Bengali Brahmin girl-child into an impassioned organizer of resistance against the British Raj, the contemporary narrator discovers and lays claim to unacknowledged elements in her American identity. Although the story of *The Tree Bride* is central, the drama surrounding the narrator, a divorced woman trying to get back with her husband, moves the novel back and forth through time and across continents.

This study aims to trace the power of resistance against colonial power through the mentality of cultural consciousness. For this purpose it includes the theories related with culture and imperialism, colonialism, and post colonialism as well as the resistance against cultural imperialism. For the discussion of representation and resistance the research includes the ideas of Edward W. Said, Helen Tiffin, Stephen Slemon, Sara Suleri and Ellek Boehmer. In "Representation and Resistance," Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write, "Post-Colonial textual resistance to colonialist edicts and representations has taken many forms" (93) clearly assert their views that there are various forms to resist against colonial mentality. This research takes *The Tree Bride* one of the powerful medium to resist as writing in its form.

Bharati Mukherjee was born in Calcutta, India. She learned how to read and write by the age of three. In 1947, she moved to Britain with her family at the age of eight and lived in Europe for about three and a half years. By the age of ten, Mukherjee knew that she wanted to become a writer, and had written numerous short stories. As Mukherjee rose with the diaspora identity, her writings are too influenced by diaspora identity of Indians migrated to the First World.

Alam, the biographer of Mukherjee says “her works focus on the phenomenon of migration, the status of new immigrants, and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates" as well as on Indian women and their struggle” (7). He further mentions, “Her own struggle with identity first as an exile from India, then an Indian expatriate in Canada, and finally as a immigrant in the United States has led to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants” (10).

Mukherjee's works correspond with biographer Fakrul Alam's categorization of Mukherjee's life into three phases. Her earlier works, such as the *The Tiger's Daughter* and parts of *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, are her attempts to find her identity in her Indian heritage. Almost all of her writings bear the issues of migrants, emigrants from Asia to Europe and America

Being an emigrant author to America from India, Bharati Mukherjee is Indian diaspora author. Her effort of writing *The Tree Bride* is a quest for cultural identity. Her quest for identity is refers her adaptation of her native heritage and rejection of westernization. Almost all the diaspora authors long for the representation of their cultural identity. The fundamental case of diaspora is the unusual migration of the people during colonialism and post-colonialism. The words like 'immigration' and 'immigrant' or 'migration' and 'migrant' just focus on a movement, disruption, and displacement rather than the perpetuation of complex patterns of symbolic and

cultural connection that came to characterize the diasporic society. The dual identity in re-located diasporic subject could be addressed through the diaspora identity. About the duality in diasporic identity, Bill Ashcroft writes:

This scattering leads to a splitting in the sense of home. A fundamental ambivalence is embedded in the term diaspora: a dual ontology in which the diasporic subject is seen to look in two directions- towards an historical cultural identity on one hand. and the society of relocation on the other. In the diasporic subject, then, we see in stark relief the hybrid and dual characteristics that are most often associated with post-colonial discourse. [. . .] Diasporic writing becomes strategic because the identity of the diasporic subject is actually inscribed. (425)

Even the diaspora author somehow challenges the western values while they try to seek their identity through their writings. They always try to dig their past in their writing as their cultural heritage. Mukherjee too in her other writings longs for her Bengali cultural identity as the representation of her identity and resistance against imperialism.

"The Tiger's Daughter" is a story about a young girl named Tara who ventures back to India after many years of being away only to return to poverty and turmoil. This story parallels Mukherjee's own venture back to India with Clark Blaise in 1973 when she was deeply affected by the chaos and poverty of India and mistreatment of women in the name of tradition. In *Days and Night in Calcutta* she writes, "What is unforgivable is the lives that have been sacrificed to notions of propriety and obedience" (217). Her husband, however, became very intrigued by the magic of the myth and culture that surrounded every part of Bengal. These differences of opinion, her shock and his awe, are seen in one of their joint publications, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*. Mukherjee in common an Indian diaspora author but in specifically she is the explorer

of ancient Bengali cultural heritage in the western world, what almost all the Bengali author does.

The second phase of her writing, according to Alam, encompasses works such as "Wife," the short stories in *Darkness*, an essay entitled "An Invisible Woman," and "The Sorrow and the Terror," a joint effort with her husband. These works originate in Mukherjee's own experience of racism in Canada, where despite being a tenured professor, she felt humiliated and on the edge of being a "housebound, fearful, affrievd, obcessive, and unforgiving queen of bitterness" (10) as mentioned by Alam. After moving back to the United States, she wrote about her personal experiences.

Mukherjee is described as having accepted being, as Alam writes, "an immigrant, living in a continent of immigrants" (9). She describes herself as American and not the hyphenated Indian-American title:

I maintain that I am an American writer of Indian origin, not because I'm ashamed of my past, not because I'm betraying or distorting my past, but because my whole adult life has been lived here, and I write about the people who are immigrants going through the process of making a home here. I write in the tradition of immigrant experience rather than nostalgia and expatriation. That is very important. I am saying that the luxury of being a U.S. citizen for me is that can define myself in terms of things like my politics, my sexual orientation or my education. My affiliation with readers should be on the basis of what they want to read, not in terms of my ethnicity or my race. (24)

Mukherjee continues writing about the immigrant experience in most of the stories in *The Middle Man and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories which won her the National Book Critics

Circle Award for Best Fiction, *Jasmine*, and essays. These stories explore the meeting of East and West through immigrant experiences in the U.S. and Canada along with further describing the idea of the great melting pot of culture in the United States.

Since the time of publication of Mukerjee's novel *The Tree Bride* has been taken from different angles .It has attracted most of critical readings. Some critics have focused on the issue of feminism, viewed from allegorical angle whereas some other critics have taken the perspective of postcolonial tool to observe the text being the text written by the author from third world particularly from Indian. About the English literature from India some critics have viewed cynically. In this connection, T. V. Subba Rao says:

Our writing in English is produced under three conditions which invalidate it's claim to the rank of literature. The authors and the reading public, having no spoken English to draw upon, stand in a false relation to the English languages; secondly they stand apart from our life and interests with scan never achieve freedom completely from affections and incapacities. These limiting factors will always be there for our authors in English. (21)

According to Rao, Indian writings in English cannot claim any distinction as literature. He contends that it is one's own language that can be natural and appropriate medium for literary expression. And, since English is not Indian language, Indians cannot express their deepest and inmost thought in it. Further, according to Rao; all the Indian fiction writers in English are "a very inferior breed of authors" (2). Critics like Rao blame both to poets and novelists who write in English from India cannot express the reality.

But unlike the critics such as Rao, there are other who appreciate the English writing from Indian writers. Now, the situation is different. In one hand English has become the global



language and common and proper medium to communicate among the different communities. On the other hand, it has become the medium to share the cultural artifacts among the different ethnical communities of the world. In this sense, writing in English by Indian writers help to preserve the Indian cultures, heritages, arts by sharing it throughout the world. Keeping all these issues in consideration, the arrival of Bharati Mukherjee as an English novelist leaves a significant mark in literature as well as Indian culture. About Mukherjee's writing in English G. S. Balaram Gupta writes:

Bharati Mukerjee, who gives what sounds in essence lukewarm praise to such Indian writers in English as Gandhi, Nehru, Anand, Bhattacharya, and R. K. Narayan, says, 'But there will be some regret that these sensitive observers of life and of society in India found themselves incapable of writing in the language they had imbibed with their mother's milk. (174)

Thus, Gupta not only defends against the charge of Rao regarding Indian English writing cannot catch the reality, but also gives the example of Bharati Mukerjee connecting her with the writing tradition of past legend English writers from India such as Nehru, Anand and Bhattacharya. Furthermore, Gupta takes Mukerjee as a mainstream English writer from India who has a sensitive observation of Indian people, society and culture.

It becomes clear that though the text has been analyzed through various perspectives, no one has dares to connect the Indian female's identity, cultural roots, rituals and values expressed by Mukherjee as a medium of resistance against cultural imperialism in the text *The Tree Bride*. So this work of dissertation aims to trace the role of one's one cultural awareness and female values as a powerful medium to resist against the cultural imperialism in *The Tree Bride*.

To deal with this awareness of cultural identity of third world as a medium to resist against colonial power in particular the cultural imperialism of the west, this research paper aims to include the notion of colonialism and post colonialism in particular the references from resistance and representation. 'Colonialism' refers to a process of one country's domination over another people or country. This process seemed possible through either psychological or Military at first the specific culture of the colonies regarded as the source of power.

The non-west becomes a major locale for them to continue this imperialism and colonialism in one or the other forms. Colonialists made the study of orient and made misrepresentation of them. Through this misrepresentation gave the European a special vantage point to continue their colonization. The colonizers in the early phase of territorial colonialism terrified the colonized to accept their superiority. But after World War it's the territorial colonialism terrified the colonized to accept their superiority. But after world war it's the territorial colonialism transferred to textual colonialism.

This textual discourse or colonialism forming continues to under pin the positive portrayals of the colonizers and the native portray also of the colonized. In order to endorse the colonizers, Lois Tyson unveils the colonialist ideology in the following way, "Colonialist ideology was based on the colonizers assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of indigenous people, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded. The colonizers believed that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized sophisticated" (366).

The above idea also takes it granted that European culture becomes the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted. This line that stands European culture up as standard for all humankind and other culture is today called Eurocentricism. A common instance of

Eurocentric's is the philosophy of so called universalism. British European and later, American cultural standard-bears judged all literature in terms of its universality. It means that literary text had to be of the universal themes and characters and judged on the standard of European literature. Thus the colonization now is in the form of text and representation of universal culture.

Universalism gave rise to European cultural superiority, too. The term other provides the colonized subject with a sense of their identity as somebody dependent, and secondary. In this way subjectivity of the colonized is continually showed in the gaze of the imperial other, the grand-outré. But, Bharati Mukherjee by focusing own myths, cultures, rituals and legends challenges the cultural imperialism or universalism of Euro American neo colonial tendency.

Colonial author always tries to present the false and negative images about the place, people and culture of Third World. It is a medium to show their superiority to the non-west people and culture. By doing so, they aim to hegeomonize their culture and civilization in non-western nations and people. But, as a typical post-colonial author, Bharati Mukherjee has tries to resist the colonial discourse and superior mentality by evoking her own history culture, myths and legends with significant out look as a source of cultural identity of native people. That is why this research work takes references from the theories of "Representation and Resistances." The topic "Representation and Resistances" is the dimension of the board post colonial studies. Post colonial studies deals with the power relation between west and non west in broad arena but the "Representation and Resistances" focuses on the cultural factor and cultural counter of non west to west that is why this research include the idea from cultural resistance in the second chapter with textual analysis, and third one concludes the research work.

## II: Resistance against Western Cultural Imperialism in *The Tree Bride*

*The Tree Bride* is a narration of its protagonist Tara Chatterjee that captures the history of Mishtigunj, a Bengali village. Coming back from America she reveals the history of Mishtigunj as her quest for cultural identity. Through her quest of her past cultural heritage, Tara Chatterjee brings the text to the hundred years back so the text could reveal about the historical facts of colonization, Hindu rituals and religion, social and cultural background of Mishtigunj during colonization, the events and incidents about Indian Independence Movement these are enough to counter the colonial mentality.

In this sense the text is an effort to revive the forgotten history of Mishtigunj. The author while rewriting the history in the form of novel not only brings the historical legends Tara Ma and John Mist but also counters the official Indian history written by British that has excluded the contribution of legends like Tara Ma and John Mist for the independence of the nation as the medium of representation of identity and resisting the cultural imperialism of the west.

There are various modes and mediums of resistance against colonialist's mentality of cultural imperialism in post colonial discourse. 'Writing,' for post colonial author has become a powerful medium of resistance throughout their works. Keeping all these issues of representation and resistance into consideration, this research work aims to observe the text *The Tree Bride* and examines its representation of its own myths, legends and culture as a post-colonial literature of resistance.

About the various mode and medium of resistance against colonialist in post colonial literature Ellke Boehmer writes in the essay "Representation and Resistance" "We should tend to think of resistance as developing locally; of being specific to nationalist of proto-nationalist groups" (94). For Boehmer, the cultural resistance develops in local level while the author writes

with the subject matter of their local issues connecting with the proto of nationalism. Mukherjee, in *The Tree Bride* picks up the local issue of Mishtigunj connecting with the theme of nationalism as a medium of cultural resistance.

Bharati Mukherjee presents Tara Chatterjee, protagonist as well as narrator of *The Tree Bridge* who has been teaching English literature in a university of the USA for many years. By racial identity she is from Bengali Brahmins family, who was born in a small village called Mishtigunj of India located near the city of Calcutta. Mukherjee portrays her protagonist shaped in cultural in-betweenness of east and west. She is in the position of cultural hybridity. People from the post-colonial nations who are migrated towards the west from non-west of post-colonialist nation have the similar experience of cultural in-betweenness or hybridity as well as they have some sort of experience of Diaspora.

*The Tree Bride* begins with the same cultural in-betweenness of its protagonist as she is in California. Mukherjee writes, “Bish and I were standing on the back porch of my house in Upper Height on a warm, November, California, night” (1). Narrator Tara Chatarjee gives no more details about her house in California , rather she suddenly flashes back towards her childhood memory in Kolkata as she says “When I was a very small child back in Kolkata, my paternal great-grand mother told me a very strange very moving story about life before birth call it the Hindu version of the stork legend” (4).

Thus Tara Chatterjee no more talks about her American life rather she turns back to her six year old when her great-grandmother used to tell the story about reincarnation, human souls and cycle of birth based on Hindu mythology. The reference gives some hints that Tara Chatterjee is inspired by her Hindu myths and legends, her ancestral heritage and past. She narrates as:

The Cosmos is created sustained, destroyed and re-created over and over again, but only one town on earth is spared during the period of cosmic dissolution. She named the town: Kashi. For my parents and my two older sister, I know Kashi by its secular name, Vanariasi, the old British Benares. But my great-grandmother set me straight. Kashi she explained is both the city of light and the city of Liberating Cremation. The god Shiva carries Kashi on the prongs of his trident. When the cosmos chars into total blankness, Kashi glows because Shiva created it as a sacred space where to die is to be saved. She intended to die in Kashi, she insisted. (5)

Tara Chatterjee explains the importance of holy city Kashi re-narrating the story told by her maternal great-grandmother. The lines further give details that why Kashi is regarded as sacred city for Hindus. Her great-grandmother desired to die and have funeral ceremony in Kashi. While Tara Chatterjee is nine year old her great-grandmother dies. Though she dies in her common bed she is regarded as if she is in Kashi. It is expressed as, “Kashi exists only in our minds my father explained. You can be sure that she died in Kashi and not upstairs in her bed” (5).

The prologue of the novel gives sufficient details that though the protagonist as well as narrator of the text is shaped in cultural in-betweenness of west and east, spends most of her narration in the description of the details about her past heritages, remembering her childhood. She talks about Hindu mythologies, issues of incarnations and furthermore she connects such issues to denote the significance of the holy city Kashi. Text itself is the representation of certain voices, norms, values and ideology. From this certain reference from the prologue of the novel, it

is clear that Mukherjee has tried to represent her ancestral identify cultural and religious heritage as well as her native land Kolkata as her medium of cultural identity.

Representation in post-colonial literature stands as a counter of the representation of colonialist literature. Colonialist literature creates false notions norms, values and truths about the colonized countries, culture and people. It establishes western norms, values and culture superior and non-western norms, values and culture as inferior. But the representation of post colonial literature tries to subvert this binary opposition and hierarchical relationship between west and non-west by evoking their one's history as the proper medium of their identity. Here, in *The Tree Bride*, Bharati Mukherjee's representation of Indian myths and ancestral heritage as a medium of resistance against the western cultures hegemony because Tara Chatterjee feels herself glorious with her culture and historical legends. It subverts the notion that European history and literature is superior and other are inferior.

About superiority of European literature, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says, "It should not be possible to read 19<sup>th</sup> century British literature without remembering that Imperialism [. . .] England's social mission" (269). In colonial literature, English man becomes an iconic figure being the medium of cultural imperialism of west. But in post colonial literature, third world authors; through the language, customs and other activities the colonialist apply the cultural hegemony of the west, as Ellke Boehmer writes in "Networks of Resistance" as, "Imperial world interconnected through the use of English clothes are the primary functions of the cultural imperialism" (114).

Representation in post-colonial literature stands as a counter of the representation of colonialist literature. Colonialist literature creates false nations norms, values and truths about the colonized countries, culture and people. It establishes western norms, values and culture

superior and non-western norms, values and culture as inferior. But the representation of post colonial literature tries to subvert this binary opposition and hierarchical relationship between west and non-west. About the nativeness of female writer in post colonial literature, Sara Suleri writes, “The category of post- colonialism must be read both as a free floating metaphor for cultural embattlement and as an almost absolute signifier for the historicity of race” (273).

Bharati Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* presents the similar counter discourse about the people, culture and place of Bengal by evoking the ancient heritage of Bangali Brahmin community in Mishtigunj. Unlike the representations of western writings that they pictures Indians as barbarous savage and illiterate; Mukherjee presents Bengali community with high academic consciousness.

After the prologue, Tara Chatterjee gives account of her visit to Dr. Khanna in San Francisco. It is her regular pregnancy check up. The conversation between Dr. Khanna and Chatterjee not only reveals about the fact of Bengali culture but also justices that she believes in destiny, as her ancestors did. In this regard, Mukherjee writes; “Do you believe destiny, Mrs. Chatterjee?” I let it pass. Who doesn’t in my family? Some cultural habits never die” (11).

Here the narrator reveals that she likes other members of her family who believes in destiny. She without any hesitation reveals it; even though she is in America not in India. The reference classifies the narrator’s celebration of her cultural identity and heritage though she is very far from her homeland.

After the reference with Dr. Khanna, Tara Chatterjee returns to her marriage life. She reveals about the incident of her marriage with Bish Chatterjee. Bish is her husband and who is six feet tall as well as from same Bengali cultural heritage. Tara Chatterjee’s marriage with Bish, too give the emphasis upon her consciousness of her rituals and cultures. Like Tara Chatterjee,



Bish too is from same “Brama Samoj.” It makes easier to deal with her family about her choice unlike her other sister, Tara Chatterjee has selected her bridegroom from same cultural heritage, cultural root and caste. It is not due to being old fashioned, but due to being conscious on her cultural identity. Because her older sister has married with somebody else from another culture and caste. About her pride of selecting bride groom from same cultural heritage she compares and contrast with the selection of her older sisters. In this regard Murkherjee writes:

My older sister, Padma the one I call Didi didn't marry until her late thirties and that was in New Jersey to a divorced Punjabi. My middle sister, Parvati found her own husband in Boston and returned with him to Bombay. Purely by coincidence, he happened to be a Bengali Brahmin from a decent Calcutta family, so no one complained. I, as youngest, upheld family honour and married Bish, the perfect groom, in the old fashioned arranged way. (14-15)

Here too Tara Chatterjee proud to be a wife to Bangali from her similar ancestral heritage. Bish Chatterjee, by profession is a good athlete. He is a cricketer Tara Chatterjee, in one hand feels glorious because she is able to follow her culture properly on the other hand she accepts the role of a wife of a Bengali Brahmin. By nature in Bengali or eastern culture wife accepts the inferior position than her husband. They feel glorious on their husbands' success. Tara's acceptance of such role is reflected as she says, "For ten years I was his 'Jewel in the crown, his 'Rani' in magazine covers" (15).

It is the Indian culture in which women feel solace in her husband's success. Woman celebrates their household's roles. They never complain about being conjoined in household's activities. Rather they feel glorious with their inward household's activity and caring children etc. There is not any dissatisfaction of Tara Chatterjee with her household roles. As a part of her

ancestral heritage and culture she is happy with her traditional household duty. In this regard, Bharati Mukherjee writes, "By twenty-two I had satisfied all my ancestral duties. I was married; I had a son material comfort, an admired husband-what else is there?" (16).

But, time onward while the plot develops it is known that Tara Chatterjee is a divorcee. It is revealed as, "In the divorce, I refused the split of assets in favor of child support and Bish's continued begins involvement in my life" (17). From this point, it is revealed that the marriage between Tara and Bish Chatterjee ends with divorce. In American society divorce between couple is not unfamiliar issue. But, unlike in America, Indian society has much more strong mechanism in marriage. So, there is no chance of divorce as well as no hierarchical relationship between couple. After the downfall of their marriage, Tara Chatterjee concentrates on the topic of marriage. She notices the differences about the notion of marriage, relationship and family values between American and Indian culture. In this connection, Tara Chatterjee says:

Marriage had not been part of the same hierarchy of obligation. Marriage was something done once and for all time to satisfy everyone expectations, then put aside. Marriage was self sustaining the way our grandparents' had been. But those are Indian assumption not American. (19)

Here, Tara Chatterjee gives details about the married life. She blames to the American assumption behind the failure of married life. In American society the relationship is not smooth, cool and harmonious between couple; which is revealed throughout the narration. The speaker as well as the protagonist of the text Tara Chatterjee being a Indian rooted diaspora people in America, compares and contrasts about the American and Indian assumption about marriage. According to the Indian assumption, marriage has not the hierarchical relationship

between bride and bridegroom; it is not the matter of obligation. It is rather happens by satisfying everyone's expectation. As her ancestors marriage is self-sustaining.

According to the narration all these aspects of marriage are Indian assumptions. They are not the American assumptions. Protagonist Tara Chatterjee lives in American with her American life style. That is why she blames upon the American assumption about the marriage for her failure married life. Her own reference of marriage makes her obliged to think about the marriage values and ethics of her Indian society. Indian society; there is not hierarchical relationship in marriage. Furthermore marriage has happens with all's satisfaction. In this regard there is less chance to fail the marriage life. Similar notion, ethics and mentality marriage keeps it long lasting. Tara Chatterjee , not only compares the American and Indian assumption about marriage; but also valorizes the Indian assumption; stressing upon the permanency of Indian marriage unlike the American assumption about marriage and relationship. From this point; it is clear that Tara Chatterjee though lives and raises in American society with American lifestyle, she is fascinated with her Indian assumption of marriage and other culture artifacts.

In Indian society marriage happens and the trace of the relationship never ends. Tara Chatterjee is well aware about this fact. It is revealed as she narrates, "Wife of Bish Chatterjee is my full identity. If it had plans for future, they would be to follow my husband where as he went probably back to India" (19). Being a woman from India the guest of marriage and her ex-husband's identity never leave Tara Chatterjee. Because, she cannot live by forgetting all her cultural roots, heritages, rituals and assumptions. She tries to escape from her husband's identity. It is reflected as Mukherjee writes, "I wandered if 'wife' was the only role permitted to me, if there was a way of being in this country with my own identity" (19).

Furthermore, protagonist Tara Chatterjee sees her ancestral heritage of East Bengal as the ultimate way to search her own identity. As far as possible Tara Chatterjee aims to escape from identity connected with Bish (her ex-husband) so she returns to East Bengal to search her original heritage, culture, roots and ancestry. In this regard, she narrates:

The first time I went back to India on my own it wasn't just to see relatives. I took Rabi with me on my own American-style roots search, into the East Bengal now Bangladesh of my grand-parents and a hundred generations of Gongoolys and Bhattacharjees. My friends and even my sister thought I'd gone crazy or very American. In particular, I wanted to see this place called Mishtigunj that everyone in the family had talked about, but no one had visited in sixty years. (20)

After divorce Tara Chatterjee feels identity crisis, rootless and lacks her self because every where she is known by her husband name. While people feels identityless and rootless they seek for their cultural heritage. Because cultural roots, heritage and ancestry are directly connected with one's identity. In search of self identity Tara Chatterjee comes back to West-Bengal as an specific place she aims to go Mishtigunj. She not only goes to see her relatives but also to seek her cultural heritage as a medium of search of her cultural identity.

Culral identity, heritage and the character from their folk narratives and folk place are some of the features of post colonial writing that aims to resist against the notion of Modern European writing about natives. Through the colonial history the empire is reflected in novel as Timothy Brennan writes:

The 'novel of empire' in its classic modernist versions (Heart of Darkness, Passage to India, The Plumed Serpent) has been bound to the impact of a world system largely directly directed by Anglo-American interests, however much it involved itself

passionately, unevenly, and contradictorily in some of the human realities of the world domination. (129)

The 'novel of empire' for the European is for the colonial purpose for the conqueror for the past. But now again the similar folk narratives and the local subject matters for post colonial writer is medium to resist there past colonial purpose for rule.

These literature captures the broad arena of nationalism as Brennan writes:

On the other hand, and just as fundamentally, literature participated in the formation of nation through the creation of 'national print media'-the newspaper and the novel. Flourishing alongside what Francesco de Santis has called 'the cult of nationality in the European nineteenth century', it was especially the novel as a composite but clearly bordered work of art that was crucial in defining the nation as an imagined community'. (129)

The representation of folk history, local subject matter are the medium of construct the empire in literature or medium to build nationalism. post colonial author's representation of the folk lore is a medium to give counter or resistance against the 'novel of empire' of the post colonial author's.

Mishtigunj is the place of her ancestors though her grandfather had left the place already. All her family members have forbidden the place depart using themselves to Calcutta. Tara Chatterjee too is born and raised in Calcutta; she has not gone to Mishtigunj where the thousand of generations of her ancestors has grown up. She aims to see the village about where, everyone of her family member talk but no one had visited in past sixty years. As the ultimate solution of her rootlessness, Tara Chatterjee visits Mishtigunj. She takes the village not as strange but as a familiar one. In this context she says, "Until I'd seen Mishtigunj, I thought I was a total Calcuttan.

But when I walked through the alleys of the old town, I felt I know the streets nothing surprised me” (20). Tara Chatterjee thus goes to the forgotten and forbidden heritage of her ancestors. She even reveals that how the Mishtigunj is forgotten through the generation with migration as, “I felt for the first time now recent my family’s Calcutta identity was, just two generation, how shallow those urban roots were not much deeper than Rabi’s in California. I saw my life on a board spectrum, with Calcutta not at the centre, but just another station on the dial (20).

Here for Tara Chatterjee, heritage of her ancestors becomes the medium of her identity. That is why she after divorce with her husband comes back to visit it. Cultural heritage, places, and ancestry are the medium of solace for her. All these aspects of cultural heritage for Tara Chatterjee are the means of solace for her. All these aspects of cultural heritage for Tara Chatterjee are the medium of challenge of her Americanness of America identity. Through the awareness of past heritage the protagonist not only tries to find her original identity but also resists against the American identity and western values ethics and assumptions.

Thus, Tara Chatterjee became identityless in American society. The identity crisis leads her to question herself that who is she. About the identity crisis in American society, Philip Gleason in “Identifying Identity” writes:

The relationship of the individual of society has always been problematic for American because of the surpassing importance in the national ideology of the values of freedom, equality, and the autonomy of the individual. In these circumstances the questions, ‘who am I?’ and ‘where do I belong?’ become inevitable. [...] In those day the characteristic problem centered around the search for identity; which was thought to arise primarily from the individual’s feeling of being rootless and isolated in a swarming, anonymous throngs. (194)

In American, these is a common natural ideology, equality and autonomous individual values. Tara Chatterjee to have such aspect in American society after being divorcee in American society. Even though, she is suffered by identity crisis as mentioned by Philip Gleason in “Identifying Identity.”

The issue of identify is the major concern of post colonial study because the people like Tara Chatterjee who are bound in cultural hybridity are suffered due to the root lesson and identity crisis. Tara Chatterjee is not confined on the position of identity crisis and rootlessness. Rather she is brought back to her ancestral heritage Mishtigunj. She is connected with her generation of Bengali- Brahmin. Thus, Bharati Mukherjee by bringing back Tara Chatterjee to Mishtigunj in search of her cultural heritage from American society where she is suffering from rootlessness tries to resist against the cultural imperialism of the west through her post-colonial text *The Three Bride*.

Again, Tara Chatterjee narrates her visit to Dr. Khanna. In this second visit she not only talks about Mishtigunj with her but also gets some old documents about this sacred place through Dr. Khanna. Dr Khanna is father once owned tea state in Calcutta during the period of British Colony. Dr. Khanna is keeping those papers waiting to the precious movement to handle to a suitable person, who is interested with Bengali culture and civilization. Thus, she meets Tara Chatterjee and handles it to her. About those historical papers and its significance in Bengali heritage; she further asserts:

‘These paper from my grandfather have been travelling for nearly a century across half the world, and they’ve settled on me like a forty- year pregnancy. If you don’t take them away today, I swear I’ll burn them. I have a feeling that you

might be the perfect person for them Mrs. Chatterjee. ‘Tara, please.’ ‘They are a history of a place you know very well, I think they’ll be like a RAM upgrade. (26)

Thus, Dr. Khanna handles these historical papers from her grandfather to Tara Chatterjee because Mrs. Chatterjee is interested with her ancient heritage as her pure root, identity and cultural background. Furthermore, Tara Chatterjee is planning to write a story of her namesake Tara Lata, probably the papers would reveal the fact about Tara Lata. The protagonist Tara Chatterjee is planning to write a book about Tara Lata as she says ‘I had been writing a book about my sister [...] and then I’d started on something new and strange. This was a distant relative we called the Tree Bride, my great-great-ant, a priest of light from the remotest, darkest galaxy of my life’ (22).

Tara Chatterjee assumes that the grandfather of Victoria Khanna must have known the Tree Bride. The Tree Bride who is Tara Lata Gangooly by her name and and protagonist is fascinated with her life as she says, ‘I have visited Mishtigunj three times in the past six years and have been writing about it, and the Tree Bride, ever since’ (27). Thus, the novel’s protagonist is going to meet about the Tree Bride. That is why she collects ancient documents from Victoria Khanna and as well as visits west Bengal and Mishtigunj time and again.

From here, the text enters into the vintage point. The rootless protagonist in search of her cultural heritage reaches to her historical place Mishtigunj. She not only concentrates on her forefather’s heritage but also reveals the story of her historical legends the Tree Bride. The historical figure the Tree Bride is bounded with her two qualities in her life which makes the protagonist regard her as her name shake. The first quality inherent within the Tree Bride is her representation of Hindu culture, rituals and myths. Another, Tree Bride had devoted her final life for the Independence Movement of India from British Colonization. Being a strong followers of



Hindu culture and ritual, The Tree Bride is the character of glory of Indian culture. She becomes the symbol of cultural heritage and rituals for Hindu community is particular for the Brahmin Samaj of West Bengal. She is the icon of Hindu community, culture and rituals.

Similarly, her later life could be analyzed through her awareness of national independence who has devoted her life against British imperialism and died on the prison at her age of eighty three. From both perspectives or aspects Tara Lata (the Tree Bride) could be regarded as an iconic figure of resistance against colonialism and cultural imperialism of west as reflected in the post colonial text *The Tree Bride*.

Bharati Mukherjee writes *The Tree Bride* revealing the story of Tara Chatterjee the protagonist and narrator of the text. The text itself is the story of Tara Chatterjee's relation and contact with her old ancestral heritage where the Tree Bride appears as an ionic figure of Bengali community being herself as a cultural and historical legend. Mukherjee writes the text; but periodically the story bears another story that how her protagonist Tara Chatterjee writes the novel about her historical legend Tree Bridge revealing all the mysteries and inherent in her legends life as an effort of resistance against cultural imperialism of the west.

The text bears same sort of autobiographical quality because there is similarity between the protagonist and author herself. Author does not present the story of legend of the Tree Bride directly rather through her protagonist Tara Chatterjee; who is writing and researching about the Tree Bride, reveals the story of the Bride. The politics of representing another figure to tell the story of the Tree Bride is to show the impact of one's own myths, legends and history to life to cultural in-between-ness blending both the western and eastern norms and values.

The Tree Bride (Tara Lata) is regarded as cultural icon of Bengali Brahmin Community. The paper brought from Dr. Khanna reveals only the fact "Tree Bride-she'd been proxy-married

to a tree at the age of five-but nothing about her later year except her death at British hand in 1943” (28). The Papers were written by British. That is why they did not cover much about Tree Bride who is legend for Indian people and culture. But, protagonist with her strong determination to write book about her, searches more hidden realities of the Tree Bride.

According to the narration the Tree Bride was narrator’s great-great-aunt, the daughter of her great-great-grandfather, Jai Krishna Gangooly. The real name of the Tree Bride was Tara Lata and she was born during the early years of national attorney. With the timeframe of Tara Lata’s birth, the narrator pictures about the place Mishtigunj where Tara Lata was born. The place was a contact zone between Hindus and Muslims. There was the religious harmony. About the Misthigunj, Tara Chatterjee says, “We’re been trained to think of Mishtaigunj as home in ways that our adopted horrors Calcutta and California, must never be. Ancestors come and go, but one’s native village one’s desh, is immutable” (29).

In this regard, Tara Chatterjee returns to Mishtigunj, her ancient heritage to her forefathers. From there she tricks the story of Tara Lata, the Tree Bride. Past for Tara Chatterjee is a part of her glory, heritage and identity. It never ends. She asserts the idea of William Faulker about the past as “I believe it was Faulkner who said the past isn’t past. The past isn’t even dead” (29).

Thus, Tara Chatterjee returns to the past during the period of colonization of Great Britain in India through the story of Tara Lata (The Tree Bride). Unlike the text written by whites, her text unveils the harmony of the past in her native place called Mishtigunij. Revealing the native history and the past of post colonial literature itself is the result of consciousness of post-colonial resistance. Similar sort of view is revealed by Edward Said in his text *Culture and Imperialism* entitled “Resistance and Opposition” as, “The post-imperial writers of the Third

World therefore bear their past within them-as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, [. . .] in which the formerly silent speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist” (212).

Said views that post-imperial authors of the Third World bear their past within them. Past and the history of Third World is written or designed according to colonialist ideology that scars of humiliating wounds for the Third World people in the colonialism. In post-imperial phase the authors reversal the myths, history and assumption about their native lands made by colonialist. The rewriting of the past by post-colonial authors is a medium of resistance against colonialist ideology. And through the past revising the own native culture and civilization is a made of resistance against cultural imperialism of west. Bharati Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* not only rewrites the past revealing the story of Tara Lata (The Tree Bride) but also regives the life of her Bengali culture, rituals and Civilization as a medium of protest against Cultural Imperialism of West.

Through the story of Tara Lata, the rituals, cultures and civilization of Bengali Brahmin community is revived throughout the text. First of all let’s observe the marriage ceremony of Tara Late. Tara Lata’s marriage was fixed in the age of seven with a twelve years old boy from a nearby village. The boy is killed by snake bite on his way to marriage ceremony. And Tara Lata should marriage with a Sundari tree in jungle. Because, cultural rituals is grater than human beings in the community. About the incident Mukherjee writes:

On his way to the ceremony, he was bitten by cobra and died. This was an impediment to marriage, perhaps, but it didn’t affect her auspicious horoscope. The marriage rites still had to be performed; marriage is bigger than participants. And so, rather than die a spinster-second only to widowhood as a personal

tragedy-on a cold foggy December night in 1879, deep in the forest, she had been married to a proxy-husband, a straight, tall Sundari tree. Other girls facing similar fates were married to rock or crocodiles. (33)

Tara Lata's finance dies on his way to marriage ceremony. That is why Tara Lata should marriage with a tall and straight sundari tree. Other girls whose finances also die marriage with rock or crocodiles. In Bengali Brahmin community if the bridegroom dies before marriage, the bride should marriage with other things like tree, rock and animals etc. It is the cultural and ritualistic aspect of that particular community. Tara Lata does the same being the 'Tree Bride'. The cultural aspect might be mocked blaming as child marriage and inhumas practice through the perspective of westerns. But, Bharati Mukharjee, being the part of same native culture and ritual regards it as her own cultural identity. That is why she feels glorious with the Tree Bride as well as her ritual, so she remarks as "marriage is bigger than the participants"(32) which means the rituals and cultures are greater than the people from such rituals and culture. Thus, evoking the awareness of native cultures and rituals is the medium of resistance against the cultural imperialism of the west in *The Tree Bride*.

Mukherjee's narrativization of the 'past' gives the heavenly representation of her ancient heritage Mishtigunj. Through, *The Tree Bride*, she is able to picturize the peaceful, harmonious countryside of Mishtigunj. The description of the past life not only represent its history but also revives the cultural identity and root for the new generation who are migrated from ancient heritage. Protagonist Tara Chatterjee through her memory revives the country life of her native land when she had visited in his childhood. She remembers, "Early every morning in their neighborhood, bells would announce the arrival of the goala, the cowherd and his cow. Servants

would empty from the shuttered houses with brass pot to collect the fresh milk, then boil it three times ” (35).

The author emphasis on the minor lively details of country, life of her native place as if it was her true identity, culture, root and heritage. The peaceful and harmonious environment of her native land it presented in lively ways. From the same surrounding, the protagonist learns culture, rituals and language. Thus the role of ancient heritage in the formation of cultural roots and identity is presented in nostalgic way as she narrates, “From my grandmother, through my mother, I learned the purer strains of Bengali, the Mistigunj dialect; the voice of East Bengal. And from my grandmother I learned the happier parts of the Tree Bride’s Story” (35).

Mukherjee in one hand presents the view that how the cultures, rituals and ancient history goes through one generation to another by presenting Tara Chatterjee’s learning about history and language from her grandmother through mother. On the other hand, she gives clarification that the knowledge of ancient past and history of one’s community gives a pure identity and cultural root to new generation. Furthermore, her representation of ancient Mishtigunj is able to revive the cultural identity of the Third World People. It itself is medium of resist against the false image of third world created by the past author from First World.

The authors such as Forster, Thompson, and Kipling who are from first world have written about native people by whites authors is old tradition and medium of colonization. It could be traced from the history of English literature from Shakespeare to Defoe as well as from Canard to or well. The primary purpose of such literature is to serve the colonial mentality of the west to non-western nations, cultures and people.

Through the literature, they create the discourse with false image of non-western culture. For them western culture is superior and non-western is inferior which ultimately aims to

rule non-west by imposing political and cultural hegemony. Edward Said gives an example of the representation of false image of India is Forster's *A Passage to India* as "Forster's commitment to the novel from exposes him to difficulties in India he cannot deal with. Like Conrad's Africa, Forster's India is a locale frequently described as inapprehensible and too large" (201).

Edward said mentions about the fact of misrepresentation of India in Edward Thompson in his text *The Other Side of the Medal*, which was published in 1926, two years, later A passage to India. In this regard, Said says:

Thompson's subject is misrepresentation. Indians, he says, see the English entirely, through the experience of British brutality during the 1897 'Mutiny.' The English, with the pompous, cold holed religiosity of the Raj at its worst, see Indians and their history as barbaric, uncivilized inhuman [...] Still Thompson says, we must recognize the fact that Indian hatred exists savage, set-hatred-is certain; and the sooner we recognize it and search for its reasons, the better. The discontent with our rule is growing universal, and there must be first, wide spread popular memories to account for that discontent being able to spread; and secondly, blazing hatred at its heart to have caused it to rather such rapid momentum.' (206)

Thomson is the first person who denotes the importance of culture in consolidating imperial feeling. He views that the writing of history is tied to the extinction of empire. He seeks for a new orientation in the histories of India attempting to understand imperialism a cultural affliction for colonizer as well as colonized.

Anyway the politic of Thompson writing is as Said says, “Thompson accepts this more fully than Forster, for whom the novel’s nineteenth century legacy of seeking the natives as subordinate and dependent is still powerful” (207). The primary purpose of the text written by colonialist author is to serve the colonialism. Through their writings they create certain truths and discourse about colonized nations, culture and people with their superior mentality. Their false notion and negative analysis of the non western nation, culture and people are obliged to be hegeomonized before the Europeans. But, the author from the post-colonial nation tries to present the counter discourse against the false nation made by the authors from first world about third world and people.

Bharati Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* presents the similar counter discourse about the people, culture and place of Bengal by evoking the ancient heritage of Bangali Brahmin community in Mistigunj. Unlike the representations of western writings that they pictures Indians as barbarous savage and illiterate; Mukherjee presents Bengali community with high academic consciousness. Here portray of Tara Lata(*The Tree Bride*) represents the view that women too had the access to education knowledge and rationality. About Tara Lata language learning Tara Chatterjee narrates:

When I realized that Tara Lata had been an actual little girl who grew up surrounded by other little girl servants and had taught herself to read Bengali, English and Persian, it seemed to me a miracle on the order of Helen Keller. The fact that she then taught the languages to the girls and boys of the village made her Annie Sullivan, and that she had fought against the colonial authorities on the side of the Indian nationalists, a Joan of Arc. (37)

The major iconic figure Tara Lata (The Tree Bride) with her name the text is nomenclature represents an icon of Bengali rituals by marrying with tree after the death of her finance in one hand. On the other hand, her devotion towards the public education and her teaching to other contemporary peoples gives the idea that there was consciousness knowledge through history in Bengali community. The connection of Tree Bride with Bengali rituals and Culture itself is the medium to express the significance of native culture and virtual itself is the medium of resistance to western culture. Because, the expression of native culture and ritual in literature means to give emphasis on individual native culture as the medium of blurring the nation of high and low cultures this cultural awareness always resist the cultural imperialism of the west. Because, west always apply the cultural monopoly throughout the world and non-west has been trying to defence it in post colonial writing.

As Tara Chattarjee narrates, “My proud claims of a Mishtingjung desh with a great-great-aunt, Tara Lata Gangooley, the Tree Bride, as a namesake” (59), the story unfolds the mystery of this ancient heritage Mishtingjung, the home of Tara Lata. She narrated, “They called it the Mist Mahal. Here is the Tree Bride stayed [...] Home of Tara Lata Gangooly (1874-1943), Freedom Fighter and Martyr known to the world as Tara-Ma. (59)

Thus, through the Tree Bride the author uncovers the history of Mishtigunj as well as life and martyrdom of another legend John Mist, who had settled the life in that place and was named after his name. Actually, John Mist is an English man who had arrived in India in his childhood as an orphan with the crew of British ship. He is devoted to his captain. But the some selfish British pirates attacks the ship kills the captain’s man and innocent boy is degenerated from British people. As the result, he is devoted to the Hinduism and Bengali community. As the award of his bravery; he has got some land in Bengal where he settles the place called



Mishtigunj with harmonious society including Hindu, and Muslim community. About John Mist Tara Chatterjee narrates, “My ancestors had been lived to that emerging village by the persuasiveness of John Mist. He offered them a chance to exercise their professions free to British influence” (63).

While revealing the nomenclature of Mistigunj, Mukherjee talks about John Mist. “Mishtigunj is the story of John Mist, [...] Tara Ma comes much later (65) reveals that John Mist was the old history of Mishtigunj. Author gives similar emphasis to John Mist as she gives to Tara Lata. Because, John Mist not only established the village, but also adapted the Bengali culture and civilization as if it was his own cultural heritage. In this regard, Tara Chatterjee narrates:

Along with not speaking the English language, Mist added another vow-never to wear English clothes' again. He tossed the borrowed jacket out the window. The Seaman's trunk held the entire native word robe, kurtas, Pajamas, shawls, and turban, which he would need or own for years to come. (144)

John Mist though born in London as an English boy, leaves all English culture with his settlement in Bengal. He leaves speaking English and starts to speak Bengali with native tone. He even leaves wearing English clothes rather he prefers wearing Kurtas, Pajamas and Shawls as a typical Bengali people. John Mist, though being an English man becomes an iconic figure stands against cultural imperialism of west. Though the language, customs and other activities the colonialist apply the cultural hegemony of the west, as Elke Boehmer writes in “Networks of Resistance” as, “Imperial world interconnected through the use of English” (113) is the primary functions of the cultural imperialism. But, Mukherjee's legend John Mist leaves all the English

culture and follows Bengali one as the powerful medium of resistance against the cultural imperialism of the west.

John Mist even advises Jai Krishna Gangooly not to follow the English tradition. It is revealed in the text as, “I am told that you find British law and British customs oppressive to your fine sense of Hindu justice” (147). The remark is by John Mist narrated to Tree Bride by her father Jai Krishna. That is why following the way traced by John Mist, Tara Lata involves in Indian independence movement against British colonization. It is the result of John Mist's contribution for Bengali community. So, Mist is told as “John Mist stands out as the perfect, and may be the last ‘British Hindoo’” (149). Furthermore it is revealed as, “Christians were barred from Mishtigunj, on the orders of Mist himself” (130). That is why Mishtigunj becomes the sacred place for native culture heritage and religions. In this sense, Bharati Mukherjee resists the colonialism with the representation of her one's cultural heritage and evoking the history of colonialism and independence.

Resistance by definition refers to the opposition, negligence or revolt against certain ideas, norms or values. In the postcolonial literature the term ‘resistance’ has its own significance due to their opposition, negligence and revolt against the colonial discourses and representation about the non western nation, culture and people. With the increasing numbers of post colonial literature, the concept of ‘representation and resistance’ has been theorized in academic and theoretical arena.

The terms ‘representation’ and ‘resistance’ come together, because with the help of representation the westerners try to establish certain truths, assumptions and discourses about non western nation, cultures and people in their writings and again through the same sort of representation post colonial literatures resist against the western assumptions, concepts and truths

about them as well as celebrates their own cultural and national identity. Thus, in the post colonial criticism theorizing representation and resistance plays very significance role in literary criticism. The significance of representation and resistance is mentioned in the *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* as:

Representation and resistance are very broad arenas within which much of the drama of colonialist relations and post-colonial examination and subversion of those relations has taken place. As Stephen Greenblatt has noted, texts were the ‘invisible bullets in the arsenal of empire. [...] post –colonial textual resistance to colonialist edicts and representations has taken many forms, from the nineteenth century parody of Macaulay’s 1835 ‘Minute’ (by an unknown Bengali writer) to the widespread contemporary practice of counter-canonical literary responses discussed by Hellen Tiffin. (93)

These clarify that representation and resistance are very board arenas. They are board in this sense that they capture the colonialist’s relations with colonized, they subverts the power relationship between them as well as they are the medium of self cultural identity. In the this sense, the nature and practice of post-colonial resistance has become an inevitable issue as it is expressed as “Theorizing the nature and practice of post colonial resistance more generally has become central to post colonial debate” (93) in *Post Colonial Studies Reader*. Similar sort of view is revealed by Edward Said in his text *Culture and Imperialism* entitled “Resistance and Opposition.” He says:

The post-imperial writers of the Third World therefore bear their past within them-as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending toward a post-colonial future, as

urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist. (212)

Said views that post-imperial authors of the Third World bear their past within them. Past and the history of Third World is written or designed according to colonialist ideology that scars of humiliating wounds for the Third World people. Now, in post-imperial phase the authors reversal the myths, history and assumption about their native lands made by colonialist. The rewriting of the past by post-colonial author, thus is a medium of resistance against colonialist ideology. And through the past revising the own native culture and civilization is a made of resistance against cultural imperialism of west.

It is revealed, “Just outside that police thana is the public square where John Mist and Raffek Hai were hanged in the fall of 1880. In that same police station, the Tree Bride died” (62). The story of Tree Bride and John Mist is interrelated. Tara Lata is just six year old when John mist and Raffek Hai were hanged. The vision of their martyars the Tree Bride throughout her life. She herself is guided by the idol of these two legands. In her interview with Mr. Treadwell she reveals as, “Everyone worshipped John Mist. He was our father an our mother. We named the village for him after he died” (214). Furthermore, Tara Lata explains the exaction of John Mist and Raffek Hai:

On that night my father and I, and Mr. Mist and Mr. Hai, were seated on a mat. They were drinking tea. Musicians had been called in. It was to be regular mela for the entire towns. But the soldiers arrived with their rifles out and bayonets drawn and proceeded to tie up Mr. Mist and Mr. Hai, the two most noble gentle

men I have ever known, and march them out the gates onto a waiting bullock cart.

They were thrown into the cart like bundles of trash. (213)

Thus during the childhood of Tara Lata they were killed by British troops. They were two most noble men she had ever seen. It impacts Tara Lata. As the result later she herself involves in independence movement. Living in Mist Mahal she protests against British Colonialism. She had lived her life like virgin many and had helped the needy one. Her devotion to Gandhi salt march movement made her as the legend. Her life establishes herself as a goddess of Mishtigunj. In this connection Mukherjee writes, “Years later, in the eyes of many, she had become a goddess, prayed to by unmarried women needing husbands and wives seeking sons” (255).

As its title suggests the entire text surrounds around the cultural and political life of its legend Tara Lata, the Tree Bride. She lives her life in Mist Mahal helping the villagers, teaching the literacy and following the strong paths and rituals of Hindu community as a child widow like virgin marry. She has the strong cultural and religious awareness as well as belief in Indian's independence. Her devotion to Gandhi's salt march movement and her death inside the police custody establishes her as a national legend. In this sense, the figure of Tara Lata itself is a powerful fusion of Indian culture and resistance against British imperialism. Tara Lata is a fusion of myths, rituals and political awareness. She donates her property for national independence movement. Even her dowry which was buried in her marriage with Sundari tree is dug out and contributed for Gandhi's salt movement. In this regard Mukherjee writes:

Where generations of Mishtigunj men had gone out at night with picks and shovels digging around the stumps of every and felled tree in hopes of finding the Tree Bride's buried dowry gold, young Gul Mohammed had sat out one night in 1930 armed with a map drawn by the Tree Bride herself. She who had never left

her marriage- house asked only that he place a flower-garland around the tree and say a Sanskrit prayer. (61)

Tara Lata herself makes a map of location of the tree in deep forest which she had married to take the gold, buried in her wedding as dowry. Though, Tara Lata never leaves her house, she has strong feeling or resistance against British imperialism. Though, in her involvement in national independence movement she never leaves her rituals of Hindu spirituality. That is why she is remarkable for her strong belief in Eastern spiritualism as well as consciousness of national freedom.

Tara Lata is the past, history, culture, myth rituals and legend for the narrator Tara Chatterjee. She by relation is great-great-aunt of the narrator. Past, history, culture and ancient heritage are the source of identity of Third-World people like Tara Chatterjee. In this regard she in search of her cultural identity reveals the legendry of Tara Lata, rituals and cultures of Bengali community as well as the colonial history of British imperialism. By doing so, the protagonist not only finds her cultural heritage as her original identity but also feels solace who sees the eastern values and spirituality is higher than the western materialism. She even procedely presents the Hindus myths in the Hindu, spirituality, the holy place Kashi and river Ganga as the ultimate solace of eastern civilization. In this regard she narrates, "An old religious training kicks in. Yama comes calling and there is no warning, no delaying only the proper respect to be shown. Death is a different state of being that's all the important thing is to western the soul to its next safe hasber and not impede it in any way" (243).

At the "Epilogue," inspiring by the legendary of Tara Lata Tara Chatterjee rejoins with her ex-husband Bish Chatterjee. Thus, Bharati Mukherjee presents the counter discourse just opposite than colonial literature in the presentation of west and her native culture, civilization

and people. She picks the story of her own legend Tara Lata, The Tree Bride from her own cultural heritage and native place connecting her with own's identity. She makes her protagonist reunion with her divorced husband through the same cultural awareness of Hindu civilization and legendry of her namesake, Tara Lata. The text *The Tree Bride* is the celebration of own's native myths, legend heritage against western cultural imperialism as a resistance against western cultural imperialism and universalism.

### III: *The Tree Bride* as an Epic of Resistance against Western Cultural Imperialism

Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride* by fusing the past and present evokes the history of West Bengal during the period of British Colonization and independence moment. Furthermore, by presenting the narrator with disphoric identity between west and east as well as with her ultimate quest of her ancient heritage culture, rituals, myths and legend from west Bengal as her cultural and historical identity; it reveals the various factors like history and culture of Mishtigunj, the background of Bengali Brahmin community, the life of legends such as Tara Lata and John Mist, their contribution on independence movement, the rituals of Hindu civilization. In this sense, *The Tree Bride* is an epic that captures all factors of West Bengal during 1850s to 1945 and the impact of its history to the new generation.

The past in *The Tree Bride* expresses the ancient civilization of West Bengal in particular and the historical and cultural significance of Mishtigunj, a frontier place where Hindu, Muslim and the westerns merge together during the period of colonization. Through the Mishtigunj the legendary of John Mist and Tara Lata (The Tree Bride) is revealed, former one has the contribution to establish the village named 'Mishtigunj' and later a widow who had married with a tree after the death of her husband being an icon of Hindu ritual. Furthermore, she had devoted her rest life to Indian Independence movement and died in jail under the authority of British rule. Both of them are martyrs. John Mist is a Hindu devotee Englishman; who was fascinated with Bengali civilization and had devoted his life for society. He was hanged by dissatisfied British Colonizer. Through the lives of these two legends, protagonist Tara Chatterjee revives her past heritage and cultural identify as she says "When Victorians dreamed, they dreamed of the future. I dream of the past" (51).



Mishtigunj, Jhon Mist and her great-great-ant Tara Lata (The Tree Bride) are her past, history and cultural heritage. These are her identity. Furthermore, The Tree Bride is her namesake being the devotee to Hindu cultures and rituals as well as her contribution to Indian nationalism which makes her a historical legend as 'Tara Ma' on the tongue of Bangali community. She is an iconic figure of narrator's cultural and religious background; an idol of Hindu woman. Tara Chatterjee not only reveals the story of Tree Bride as her cultural identity; but also rejoins with her divorced husband its participants. The Tree Bride becomes a role model for this assumptions. In this regard the story of legendary of The Tree Bride itself is a powerful resistance against the cultural imperialism of the West.

Colonial author always tries to present the false and negative images about the place, people and culture of Third World. It is a medium to show their superiority to the non-west people and culture. By doing so, they aim to hegeomonize their culture and civilization in non-western nations and people. But, as a typical post-colonial author, Bharati Mukherjee has tried to resist the colonial discourse and superior mentality by evoking her own history culture, myths and legends with significant out look as a source of cultural identity of native people. That is why Mukherjee values the eastern culture and civilization as a resistance against western cultural imperialism, as she reveals, "I remember my great-grand mother's story of god Shiva showing Kashi to his bride, Parvati. Kashi, the luminous city, where death holds no terror and no finality" (285).

Time and again, protagonist Tara Chattrjee glorifies her culture rituals, religion and Indian spiritualism. She mentions about the holy city Kashi, the holy river Ganga as well as religious orthodox of Hindu. All these aspects are nothing else but a resistance against western culture and civilization. Murkherjee, ever does not hesitate to mention some Englishmen such as

John Mist and Nigel Conghlin who are Hindu devotee. In this regard Mukherjee narrates that John Mist even had banned all Christians and Western culture from Mishtigunj.

The politics of Mukherjee to depict the westerner's devotion towards the Hindu spiritualism and Bengali culture is to denote the superiority of own's native culture and civilization. It is the opposition of the idea that western culture is superior and non-westerners are inferior. This notion is the major characteristics of colonial literature. But, Mukherjee reverses the tradition of colonial literature as an emerging post colonial author from post colonial nationalism. In reversing the colonial literature of representing natives as uncivilized, barbaric and inhuman; she presents such image to English people and place. While, Mukherjee provides the background of John Mist, who was an orphan in London, she describes the pitiful street life of London as she tells that in most trust babies were plucked from the docks in nineteenth century London.

Thus, Bharati Mukherjee presents the counter discourse just opposite than colonial literature in the presentation of west and her native culture, civilization and people. She picks the story of heroism of her own legend Tara Lata, The Tree Bride from her own cultural heritage and native place connecting her with own's identity and cultural and national glory. She makes her protagonist's reunion with her divorced husband through the same cultural awareness of Hindu civilization and legendry of her namesake, Tara Lata. In this regard, the primary purpose of the text *The Tree Bride* is the celebration of own's native myths, legend heritage against western cultural imperialism.

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