

Tribhuvan University

**Recreating History as the Counter against Colonial Discourses in
Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride***

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Abstract

This research work aims to depict the reversal of constructed truth of colonial history in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride*. It deals with the discourse fabricated by post-colonial authors in their writing about native Indians and their lands as counter discourse against colonial history made by the colonial authority. Mukherjee blends the ancient history of Mishtigunj taking the references of its establishment by John Mist and the events and incidents from Indian Independence Movement together with the fictional writing as a task of rewriting history. Mukherjee brings the historical facts of Independence Movement and historical figures like Tree Bride (Tara Lata) and John Mist who were excluded in official history as the counter against official British history. Official history only includes the events and incidents that are in the favor of the rulers in order to serve the colonial mentality but Mukherjee by revealing the forgotten and untold history during colonialism tries to subvert the colonial history through in the form of fictional writing.

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I. *The Tree Bride* and Historical Agendas of Post Colonial Nation

This research work, based on *The Tree Bride* by Bharati Mukherjee, particularly deals with the discourse and counter discourse regarding truth about Bengali culture and heritage at the background of Indian Independence Movement. The research exposes how the text reverses the false truths of colonial history about Bengali people, society, eastern culture, rituals myths and legends and shows how a non-western author like Bharati Mukherjee are able to reverse the colonial assumptions about history and third world people through their writing. Non-western authors like Mukherjee write their history about native lands to wrestle against the false truth created by colonial discourse. Their re-writing the nationalism and history could be brought into the dimension of New Historical standpoint of the text.

New Historicism developed as a literary theory in the late 1970s. Yet, the term was only coined several years later by Stephen Greenblatt. He, first, used the term in a 1982 essay collection dealing with Renaissance studies. According to a very basic definition in Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory*, new historicism is "a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period" (172). Previously, literary critics had predominantly used text-only approaches to interpret a literary work by considering the historical influences on a text which had often been neglected before.

Text creates certain truth about a representation. It is taken as a discourse that constructs certain assumption and ideas what it writes about. Writers too write books to create certain assumption and truth influenced by certain power and social structure. In this sense, they are the mediator of certain agency. Throughout the history, the Westerners who have the colonial mentality have been writing books with the representation of certain colonial voices. They through the writing the writing

have been creating the false images of non-Western cultures, people and society.

Even the history written by colonizers excludes the glorious facts of natives in their lands and includes the assumptions and ideas that support the colonizers. The Westerners' bias notion in the representation of history and literature about natives could be traced in the writing of Shakespeare to Defoe as well as Macaulay to Fosters. The European writing is not untouched with the fact that it has been creating false images through the discourse of writing. As claimed by Chinua Achebe, Shakespeare in *The Tempest* creates a false impression of Cannibal and Defoe creates the character of Friday as a savage and barbaric and his protagonist Crouse's mission is to civilize native and their community that ultimately support the point that Europeans are civilized and it is their mission a duty to civilized the others. So, in the name of civilizing the natives the Westerner aims to rule. For this purpose, they create certain discourse with their claim that they know the natives better. About knowing natives, creating certain assumption about them and to rule them by Europeans, Chinua Achebe writes:

To the colonialist mind it was always of the utmost importance to be able to say: 'I know my natives,' a claim which implied two things at once: (a) that the native was really quite simple and (b) the understanding him and controlling him went hand in hand understanding being a pre-condition for control. (74)

Each and every colony goes through the similar understanding of colonizers. In colonizer's understanding there is a false notion about natives that help to be European superior than natives. Modern age too is not untouched with the fact of creating certain discourses about natives and ruling them by the Westerners.

India also goes through similar plight while it is colonized by British. The

English authors like Jorge Macaulay and E. M. Fosters created certain discourses about Indian people, culture, ritual and history that could help to rule it by creating discourses and constructing truths. For this purpose, they included the aspects that were favorable to the British colonizers and excluded the perspectives of natives. But, the emerging authors from India after the territorial imperialism have been writing the text that can create a new discourse of Indian people, culture and rituals as well as that can counter the pre-existing false ideas created by colonizers. This research work aims to take the text *The Tree Bride* and tries to deal with that how Bharati Mukherjee tries to create the Indian discourses and counters against the Westerner's perspective about India.

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 she is from Bengali cultural heritage. 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. 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.

The text on one hand could be taken as the historical fiction, and on the other hand it could be regarded as the counter against official British history. The research mobilizes the theoretical insights of New Historicism to justify the claim. It captures the historical with textuality being concerned with the notion of New Historicism.

New Historicism means studying literature in relation to its historical contexts. It is further targeted to question on the authenticity of official history, since the history for New Historicism cannot capture the linear way of facts and truths.

Tara Chatterjee is the protagonist as well as the narrator of the novel. She is shaped according to ancient Indian myths, customs, tradition and highly influenced by the role of myths and legends on the formation of cultural identity and heritage of the third world people. With her trial back to Mishtigunj in search of her cultural heritage and hidden history of this place, Bharati Mukherjee brings the history of Tara Ma and John Mist. The history tries to resist the British official history as the counter discourse against colonialism.

Tara Chatterjee is a woman living in San Francisco and she is from the Bengal. She is shaped according to ancient Indian myths, customs and tradition. She is highly influenced by the role of myths and legends. She, as an Indian woman, 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, tradition and history is Mukherjee's awareness of forgotten history as well as it is her effort to create counter discourse against colonialism, because since the beginning the colonial author have been presenting the false picture about natives.

The text begins when Tara Chatterjee's San Francisco house is firebombed by a man obsessed with killing her. Then the text 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 fiancé died. Mukherjee reveals later that Tara Lata bravely conspired to win Bengal's independence from England.

Through the novel, 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 in the novel their cruelty, bigotry and duplicity are revealed. Thus, the text reveals the story of colonial resistance by Bangladeshi people in one hand; through the legend of Tara Lata it reveals the ancient place Mishtigunj evoking the hidden history. The history of Tara Lata is forgotten by Indians because the British has excluded it from the official history. Mukherjee once again rewrites it by merging fiction and facts within the text *The Tree Bride*.

Mukherjee focuses on Indian nationalism with the history of Mishtigunj as Timothy Brennan writes, "It is especially in third world fiction after the Second World War that the fictional use of 'nation' and 'nationalism' are most pronounced. The 'nation' is precisely what Foucault has called a 'discursive formation'" (128). Mukherjee brings the issue of Indian Independence Movement with the story of Tara Ma as a tone of nationalism. The issue of nationalism itself is a discourse against colonization in third world literature.

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

Colonial writing, mostly through the textual representation, creates the falsity about the colonized nation and people. 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 hegemonizing the rest of the world apart from 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 this won 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 is 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 as 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.

The writers, from the Post-Colonial nations try to subvert or blur the traditional assumptions through their writing. Bharati Mukherjee, in *The Tree Bride* tries to subvert the falsity of Colonial history with her rewriting of history of Indian Independence Movement in fictional account in similar way. This research aims to denote how Bharati Mukherjee has resisted against the official Indian history made by British through the 'historicity with text' in *The Tree Bride*.

Tara Chatterjee's iconic legend Tara Lata not only follows the Indian rituals by

getting married with the 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 quest for cultural heritage and deep concern with historical evidences that could blur the traditional assumptions of colonized about third world. The consciousness of self-history of the post-colonial writer reflects the awareness of truth and falsity of history made by colonial nations through rewriting the colonial history.

The research work makes an attempt to denote the resistance against the colonial history 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 TaraLata. The story of Tara Lata (*The Tree Bride*) unfolds the mystery of her ancient heritage Mishtigunj as well as another legend John Mist, the place is named after his name.

Another historical figure in the novel is John Mist. He 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 the cultural superiority of East upon West. John Mist is hanged by British officials. So, he becomes historical legends as well as inspiration of the Tree Bride. The legendry of John Mist is too a medium of rewriting the colonial history in *The Tree Bride*. The Mishtigunj history narrated by its protagonist Tara Chatterjee is a means for subverting the colonial superiority in post-colonial nation and people through the representation.

In the novel *The Tree Bride*, the author fuses 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 consciousness of nationalism as a means of reversal of colonial history.

Bharati Mukherjee has long been known not only for her elegant, evocative prose but also for her characters. Her characters are influenced by ancient customs and traditions but also very much rooted in modern times reflects that for post-colonial people history in the medium to subvert the traditional colonial power relationship.

Similarly, Mukherjee is regarded as diaspora author. 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 lead to her current contentment of being an immigrant in a country of immigrants" (10).

Mukherjee's works correspond with the issues of Indians, its history and geographical locality. "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 when

she was deeply affected by the chaos and poverty of Indian 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). She became very intrigued by the magic of the myth and culture that surrounded every part of Bengal. These differences of opinion, her shock and awe, are seen in one of their joint publications, *Days and Night in Calcutta*. Mukherjee is common an Indian diasporas author but in specifically she is the explorer of ancient Bengali cultural heritage in the Western world, what almost all the Bengali author does. 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 the Stories*, a collection of short stories which won her the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Fiction. Her 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.

Jasmine develops this idea of the mixing of the East and West with a story telling of a young Hindu woman who leaves India for the U.S. after her husband's murder, only to be raped and eventually returned to the position of a caregiver through a series of jobs. The unity between the First and Third worlds is shown to be in the treatment of women as subordinate in both countries. Famine issue is another inevitable factor of Mukherjee's writing.

In "*Leave It to Me*," Mukherjee tells the story of a young woman sociopath named Debby DiMartino, who seeks revenge on parents who abandoned her. The story reveals her ungrateful interaction with kind adoptive parents and a vengeful search for her real parents. The novel also looks at the conflict between Eastern and Western worlds and at mother-daughter relationships through the political and emotional topics by the main character in her quest for revenge.

Since the time of publication of Mukherjee'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. SubbaRao 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 is other who appreciates 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:

BharatiMukherjee, 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 defense against the charge of Rao regarding India English writing cannot catch the reality, but also gives the example of Bharati Mukherjee connecting her with the writing tradition of past legend English writers from India such as Nehru, Anand and Bhattacharya. Furthermore, Gupta takes Mukherjee 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 history within the text as the counter against the Colonial discourse. Indian history of Independence Movement as mentioned in the text with the central figures like John Mist and Tara Lata is the medium of resist against colonial history. This work of research aims to trace the rule of rewriting natives' history as the counter against the assumptions of colonizers about natives.

This textual discourse or colonialism forming continues to under pin the positive portrayals of the colonizers and the negative portray 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 thesis own Anglo-European culture was civilized sophisticated" (366). The idea also takes it granted that European culture becomes the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted.

Colonial writing 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 of fiction.

As the focus of research is New Historical perspectives, it tries to observe the discourses about native lands by colonial authors and its challenge by new author from post-colonial society in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride*. Mukherjee's text is not only the politician one due to its focus upon the freedom fighter Tara Lata but also a social and cultural as it represents the socio/cultural picture of ancient Mishtigunj.

Mukherjee's voice in the text is the voice of these culturally minorities groups, who have been obliged to be politically colonized in the past and culturally colonized in present. Mukherjee through the story of Tree Bride try to resist the colonial mentality as Westerners are superior and Non Westerners are inferior with her counter discourse just reverse than colonial author. Through the perspective of discourse, truth and function of power, culture and politics *The Tree Bride* is a perfect text to bring into the dimension of New Historicism due to its blend between history and fiction and rewriting of Indian social/cultural/political history. *The Tree Bride* being the literary text with the historical references of Mishtigunj and Indian Independence Movement, it is relevant to deal with New Historical perspective to evoke the historicity of text.

Previously, literary critics had predominantly used text-only approaches to interpret a literary work and, thus, historical influences on a text had often been neglected. In the literary text the New Historicism might be effective perspective because every text is situated in certain time frame. So, in contrast to former approaches, new historicism does not privilege the literary text, but instead as Barry Peter writes, "literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly

inform or interrogate each other” (172). This new understanding of the relationship between these different types of texts also calls for a new understanding of the relationship between texts and history. Hence, advocates of the theory are interested in the representation of history in written texts, or, as Peter Barry calls it, in “history-as-text” (175).

This thesis gives general introduction of author, text and topic in first chapter. Similarly, second chapter it deals with textual analysis of *The Tree Bride* as the counter historical discourse against colonial writing in fictional form. Likewise, last chapter summarizes the idea how Non-western author creates counter historical discourse against colonial assumptions in their writing. The research, thus, centers on rewriting history and revealing the untold facts of history are the most important features of post-colonial writing within its three chapters.

II. Rewriting Colonial History 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 as well as a resistance against the history made by colonial power about India. 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 as well as social and cultural background during colonization. The events and incidents about Indian Independence Movement appear in the text as flashback narration that only presents the history of native village but also stands as the counter of colonial or official British history.

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 like Tara Ma and John Mist, but also counters the official Indian history written by British. Since the British history has excluded the contribution of legends like Tara Ma and John Mist and their contribution on Indian Independence Movement. To evoke the forgotten past is the medium of representation of identity and resisting the cultural imperialism of the West.

There are various modes and medium of resistance against colonialist's mentality of cultural imperialism in post-colonial discourse and one of the medium is rewriting the colonial history through the perspective of natives. 'Writing', for post-colonial author has become a powerful medium of resistance throughout their works. Rewriting the forgotten history of self is also one of the key factors of colonial country to counter the history of colonial which is clearly presented in *The Tree Bride*. Keeping all these issues of representation and resistance into the 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 counter of colonial history.

Writing history is one of the medium of resistance against colonial's assumptions or mentality about natives. About the various mode and medium of resistance against colonialist mentality and history in post-colonial literature ElikeBoehmer writes, "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 history of Mishtigunj connecting with the theme of nationalism with flashback of colonial period as a medium of resistance against colonial history.

Bharati Mukherjee presents Tara Chatterjee, who has been teaching English literature in a university of USA since years as a protagonist as well as narrator of *The Tree Bride*. 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. Narrator Tara Chatterjee gives no more details about her house in California, rather she suddenly flashes back towards her childhood memory of 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, the text suddenly jumps to the Bengal from America to talk about the history of native land.

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 own 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, Varanasi, 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). She talks about Hindu mythologies, issues of incarnations and furthermore she connects such issues to denote the significance of the holy city Kashi. Mukherjee’s remembrance of her childhood and native land further leads her to write the fiction based on the history and historical legends of Mishtigunj.

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 identity, cultural and religious heritage as well as the history of her native land Kolkata. It further leads the novel to the forgotten history of the place and people being concerned on native locality. Later it represents the history of Indian Independence Movement which should be studied under the history within the text which presupposes the reciprocal relation between history and fiction.

New historicists seek for the relationship of history and literature as M. H. Abrams writes, “reciprocal concern with historicity of texts and textuality of history” (209). Therefore, new historicists consider historical accounts as equally interpretable as literary texts as Peter Berry mentions, “... since both are seen as expressions of the same historical moment” (173). With her flashback to the past to India, Mukherjee too brings the history in the form of literary genres.

Her history not only makes representation but also subverts the Colonial representation regarding Indian history, society and people. 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.

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 her identity. Mukherjee's representation of Indian myths and ancestral heritage in connection with Mishtigunj history is a medium of resistance against the Westerners who have neglected the glorious issue of natives while writing about them. Protagonist Tara Chatterjee feels herself glorious with her historical legends. It subverts the notion that European history and literature

is superior and other are inferior. For this purpose, Mukherjee tries to rewrite the colonial history.

About superiority of European literature, GayatriChakravortySpivak says, “It should not be possible to read nineteenth 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 ElkeBoehmer 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 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. Even the history of colonizer functions in favor of colonizer hence the glorious sides of colonies are always forgotten in official history of colonizers. But the authors from the third world try to capture the hidden history in their writings in order to counter the official history of colonizers. Bharati Mukherjee by bringing the historical facts about Mishtigunj as well as bravery of Tara Lata and John Mist who have fought against British colonization tries to resist against the official history of British in *The Tree Bride*.

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).

Colonial nations create the certain history of colonies to be superior then colonies through the misrepresentations in history and writings.

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 picture Indians as barbarous savage and illiterate; Mukherjee presents Bengali community with high academic consciousness evoking its ancient and hidden history which was always neglected by colonial history. In this sense, the representation of localness about native is the resistance against the colonial history made by colonizers.

Tara Chatterjee gives account of her visit to Dr. Khanna in San Francisco. It is her regular pregnancy checkup. 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. Tara Chatterjeesees her ancestral heritage of East Bengal as the ultimate way to search her own identity which not only reveals the India culture but also brings the hidden history about Mishtigunj the facts and figure about the Indian Independence Movement.

Tara Chatterjee aims to escape from identity connected with America, 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 Rahi 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 herself because everywhere she is known by her husband name. While people feels identity-less and rootless they seek for their cultural heritage. Because cultural roots, heritage and rootless. 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 a 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.

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 thousands of generations of her ancestors have grown up. Tara Chatterjee aims to see the village about where each 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 generations, 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 center, but just another station on the dial (20). That is why the protagonist goes to Dr. Khanna in order to find out the history of Mishtigunj.

Tara Chatterjee narrates her visit to Dr. Khanna which reveals how she came to know about the history of Mishtigunj. 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 papers 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 update. (26)

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 who is not mentioned in the official British history.

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). The point clarifies that the hidden historical facts are one of the prominent factors of writing for post-colonial authors what Bharati Mukherjee does in *The Tree Bride*.

Tara Chatterjee assumes that the grandfather of Victoria Khanna must have known the Tree Bride. *The Tree Bride* who is Tara Lata Gongooly by her name and the 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 in order to revive the history of Mishtigunj.

From here, the text enters into the vintage point. The 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 name shake. The first quality inherent within *The Tree Bride* is her representation of Hindu culture, rituals and myths. Another, Tree Bride has devoted her final life for the Independence Movement of India from British Colonization. Being a strong follower of Hindu

culture and ritual, *The Tree Bride* is the character of glory of Indian culture. She becomes the symbol of cultural heritage and ritual for Hindu community as well as freedom fighter in the history of Indian Independence.

Her later life could be analyzed through her awareness of national independence. She had devoted her life against British imperialism and died on the prison at her age of eighty-three. From both perspectives, 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*. In this sense, the rewriting the history of Tara Lata in the form of fiction means to reveal the hidden truths about colonial India. The text in the narration of the events and incidents about Tara Lata perfectly blends the history and fiction together.

New historians think that no text can be put in isolation from its historical context. It is impossible to get objective truth in any text because like all human beings, writers also live in a particular time and place and their views are shaped consciously or unconsciously by the experiences within their own culture as Louis Montrose defines the new historicism "as a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (416).

The 'historicity of texts' means the text is embedded with certain economic, cultural, social and political conditions of its production. Mode of reading is also determined by cultural, political, social and economic embeddedness of the readers. In the same way 'textuality of history' means that the history cannot be purely objective. Objectivity is determined by power and culture as Lois Tyson says "our subjectivity or selfhood is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born" (280).

Bharati Mukherjee writes *The Tree Bride* revealing the story of Tara Chatterjee the protagonist and narrator of the text. Tara Chatterjee is a completely

fictional character who functions the bridge to bring historical figure like Tara Lata and John Mist in the novel. 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 iconic 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 Bride revealing all the mysteries and inherent in her legends life with the proper blend of history and fiction to revive the hidden history as the counter of official history of colonizers with the proper blend between history and fiction.

The Tree Bride (Tara Lata) is regarded as cultural icon of Bengali Brahmin Community and historical icon for Indian Independence Movement. The paper brought from Dr. Khanna reveals only the fact "Tree Bride-she's 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 because colonial history aims to hide the historical facts which is in the favor of colonized. Official history is always influenced by the power politics.

Time and again Chatterjee narrates the negligence of Tara Lata in historical accounts by the colonial authority which clearly presupposes the idea of New Historians that the official history due to the influence of power hides some truth or twists the accounts in official history. Tara Chatterjee was a freedom fighter and had died in prison so most of her information was not brought outside by the administration. The negligence of Tara Lata by British official history is due to the influence of power. As the freedom fighter, she cannot be the ideal for British rather for Indians. So, British official excluding Tara Lata's history tries to hide the truth

from history which could be well deal with New Historicism.

New Historians view that power is generated in society by producing discourse and by constructing truths. Power determines the truth and as soon as the system of society changes truth also changes. Foucault further states that "truth is the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable in the long baking process of history" (85). For Nietzsche, "only by means of forgetfulness can man ever arrive at imagining that he possesses truth" (635). However, there are illusions instead of truth. Truth is the illusion of which one has forgotten it to be so. In this regard, Stephen Greenblatt says, "Truth itself is radically unstable and yet constantly stabilized" (74).

The exclusion of Independence history of India reflects the notion of New Historicism how the authority or power neglects, hides or suppresses the voice of colonized. To create the situation in its favor, the power excludes the opponent voices what the British regime does in India. There is relevance between the cultural voices and New Historicism hence the new Historicism deals with the neglected voice by main stream cultural and political power.

Mukherjee's voice in the text is the voice of these Indian cultural groups who are neglected in British history that could be addressed with new historical cultural point of view. Through the protagonist with her strong determination to write book about her, searches more hidden realities of *The Tree Bride* as she narrates, "Of all her stories, the one that moved me most was about my namesake, Tara Lata, *The Tree Bride* of Mishtigunj, the five years-old almost-widow who was forced to marry a tree as surrogate husband and then expected by villagers to lend a life of resigned self-abasement" (38).

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 Lala and she was born during the early years of national attorney. With the timeframe of Tara Lala's birth, the narrator pictures about the place Mishtigunj where Tara Lala was born. The place was a contact zone between Hindus and Muslims. There was the religious harmony. About the Mishtigunj, Tara Chatterjee says, "We're been trained to think Mishtigunj 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).

Tara Chatterjee returns to Mishtigunj, her ancient heritage to her forefathers. From there she tricks the history of Tara Lala, 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 Faulkner about the past as "I believe it was Faulkner who said the past isn't past. The past isn't even dead" (29).

Revealing her past history with her own historical legend is a medium of creating own history. The narrator since raised and read in post-colonial India has the influenced with British history, culture and English language since her childhood. In her childhood, the Englishmen's ideal were her namesake as she writes, "It's almost funny, thinking of little Bengali girls crying about Marie Antoinette, Napoleon, or Caesar, yet I always thought of them as Bengalis like us. Their defeat, often as a result of ultimate betrayal, was our history" (38). Since the growing the children of post-colonial countries raised according to the schooling of colonizer's perspective and design of course. That is why the narrator in her childhood chooses Western history and legends.

As the ultimate way to revive own history and historical legends 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 Mishtigunj. Revealing the native history and the past of post-colonial literature itself is the result of consciousness of post-colonial resistance which is expressed in the form of history within the textuality.

Mukherjee's writing history is from the post-colonial point of view. 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 author's reversal the myths, history and assumption about their native lands made by colonist is appear in the form of fiction with historical references what Mukherjee does in *The Tree Bride*.

The rewriting of the past by post-colonial authors is a medium of resistance against colonialist ideology. 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 is 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 Mishtigunj dialect; the voice of East Bengal. And from my grandmother I learned the happier parts of the Tree Bride's story" (35).

Through the past revising the own native culture and civilization with the historical accounts, the author resists against the official British history about India. Bharati Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* not only rewrites the past revealing the story of Tara Lata is a perfect way to deal with history. 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 past Mishtigunj is able to revive the self-history that stands independently with its counter to colonial history.

It itself is medium of resist or the counter discourse against the false image of third world created by the past authors 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 as well as medium of self-superiority. It could be traced from the history of English literature from Shakespeare to Defoe as well as from Canard to or well.

Through the literature, they created the discourse with false image of non-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). The first world author's writing creates the certain discourses to construct certain assumptions and ideas of native land in the favor of ruling colonizers.

About the discourse created by first world author Edward Said mentions the remark of Thomson with regard to the false representation of India in colonial's text. 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 'Munity.' 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 o 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 politics of Thompson writings are 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 with creation of certain discourses and construction of certain truth. 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 hegemonized before the Europeans. But, the author from the post-colonial nation tries to present the counter discourse against the false notion made by the authors from first world about third world and people.

Bharati Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* presents the similar 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 picture Indians as barbarous savage and illiterate; Mukherjee presents Bengali community with high academic consciousness. Here portrayal 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 fiancé 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 of knowledge through history in Bengali community. Here is the clear social and cultural influence on the author.

Stephen Greenbelt also talks about social/cultural/political influence on the author. He writes about power that at once localized in a particular institution-court, the church, the colonial administration-diffuses in ideological structure of meaning that characterizes modes of expression and recurrent narrative patterns. He further states, "Art does not pretend to be autonomy; the written word is self-consciously embedded in specific communities, life situations, and structures of power" (7).

Power changes in different ways and so do the forms of discourses. It shifted from the church to the book to the absolutist state and from celebration to rebellion, to subversive submission in renaissance period. He writes, "Self-fashioning occurred at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien that what is marked for attack and hence that any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss" (9).

Louis Montrose, a leading new historicist, views literature and history as interdependent. Ne historicism refigures the relation between the verbal and the social, between the text and the context. It rejects some prevalent alternative idealist, empiricist and materialist conceptions of literature as an autonomous aesthetic, moral or intellectual order. Montrose comments that "writing and reading are always historically and socially situated events, performed in the world and upon the world

by ideologically situated individual and collective human agents" (415). Montrose emphasizes that authors represent the characters, world, and subject matter or create discourses according to their position where they inhabit:

Representations of the world in written discourse participate in the construction of the world; they are engaged in shaping the modalities of social reality and in accommodating their writers, performers, readers and audiences to multiple and shifting subject positions within the world that they themselves both constitute and inhabit.(405)

Montrose believes that a closed and static monolithic and homogeneous notion of ideology must be replaced by heterogeneous and unstable permeable and processual. Proper attention must be given the manifold meditations involved in the production, reproduction and appropriation of an ideological dominance. He further claims, "All texts are ideologically marked, however multivalent or inconsistent that inscription may be" (405).

Mukherjee too is guided by the social, cultural and political ideology of the colonized. Her ideology is reflected in the novel as the resistance against the colonial history. 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 defend it in post-colonial writing by rewriting their history in the form of fiction.

Mukherjee's effort to raise the issue of Bengali history with regard to Tara

Lata and John Mist is the discourse against the constructed truth of the colonizer. In doing so, Mukherjee narrates the history through the mouth of her protagonist revealing the hidden historical evidence. As Tara Chatterjee narrates, “My proud claims of a MishtigunjDeshwith a great-great-aunt, Tara LataGangooley, the Tree Bride, as a namesake” (59), the story unfolds the mystery of this ancient heritage Mishtigunj, the home of Tara Lata. She narrated, “They called it the Mist Mahal. Here is *The Tree Bride* stayed [...] Home of Tara LataGangooly (1874-1943), Freedom Fighter and Martyr known to the world as Tara-Ma” (59).

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 some selfish pirates attack the ship kills the captain's mess and innocent boy is degenerated from British people. As the result, he is devoted to the Hinduism ad Bengali community. As the award of his bravery; he has get 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 Mishtigunj, 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 civilizations 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 truck held the entire native wardrobe, 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.

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 Hindu’” (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 cultural 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.

The writing history is the medium of representation of truth through discourse and medium resistance of constructed truth. 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 through the historical writing in fiction helps to revive the forgotten history what Mukherjee does in *The Tree Bride*.

The terms 'representation' and 'resistance' came together, because with the help of representation the Westerners try to establish certain truths, assumptions and discourses about no 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 significant 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 subvert the power relationship between them as well as they are the medium fself-cultural identity. In 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 red playable 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 the post-colonial phase the authors reversal the myths, history and assumptions about their native lands made by colonialist. The rewriting of the past by post-colonial author is a medium of resistance against colonialist ideology. And through the past revising the own native culture and civilization is a made of counter against constructed truth by colonizer.

Mukherjee throughout the book reveals the untold hidden historical evidences about the death of Tara Lata. It is revealed, “Just outside that Police-Thana is the public square where John Mist and RaffekHai 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 years old when John Mist and RaffekHai were hanged. The vision of their martyrs *The Tree Bride* throughout her life. She herself is

guided by the idol of these two legends. In her interview with Mr. Treadwell she reveals as, “Everyone worshipped John Mist. He was our father and our mother. We named the village for him after he died” (214). Furthermore, Tara Lata explains the exaction of John Mist and RaffekHai:

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 town. 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 gentlemen 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 revolves 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 dig out and contributed for Gandhi's salt march 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 and Mukherjee reveals the historical facts blending fiction within historical evidences, social and cultural backgrounds.

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 Lata. 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. Cultural ritual is greater than human beings in the community in her society.

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 fates were married to rock or crocodiles. (33)

Tara Lata's fiancé dies on his way to marriage ceremony. That is why Tara Lata should marriage with a tall and straight Sundari tree. Other girls of the community whose fiancés 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 inhuman practice through the perspective of Westerns. But, Bharati Mukherjee, 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 picture that 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 goal, 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).

Since, the New Historicists believe in the relationship between text's situatedness and the author's cultural position as Habib mentions, "situating of literature within a broader cultural network" (762), Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride* captures the author social and cultural position. Being the author from Bengali socio/cultural background her text revives the ancient Bengali culture and rituals. History and culture often get lumped together under the category of "new historicism". The sheer number of historical and cultural studies that have appeared since the early 1990s, including the dominance of the still-larger umbrella term, cultural studies, makes the cordoning off of a group of critics as "New Historicists" difficult. The effort to do so is certainly not helped by the fact that some of the most prominent New Historicists, like Stephen Greenblatt and Alan Liu, either reject or critique the very term, "New Historicism" as mentioned by Habib:

In general, both Greenblatt and subsequent critics identified with new historicism rejected the notion that it was a theory or a specific

doctrine. Rather, they identified some persistent concerns and approaches, some of which have been indicated above, such as the rejection of the formalist notion of aesthetic autonomy and the situating of literature within a broader cultural network. Louis Montrose stressed that this contextualization of literature involved a reexamination of an author's position within a linguistic system. Montrose also points out that New Historicists variously recognize the ability of literature to challenge social and political authority. (Habib, 762).

Nonetheless, this critical school and those scholars commonly associated with the school have been hugely influential and scholarship of the last decade, so it's important to come to grips with some of the general trends and common practices of this critical approach. New Historicists take this position further by then claiming that all cultural activities may be considered as equally important texts of historical analysis.

While the 'historicity of texts' refers that the text is embedded with certain economic, cultural, social and political conditions of its production and mode of reading and writing both are also determined by cultural, political, social and economic factors of the readers and writer. In this sense, the fictional writing too has some sort of socio/cultural influence of author's situatedness. In the same way 'historicity of the text' too demands the influence of socio/cultural standpoint of the author. As told by Tyson that our subjectivity or selfhood is shaped by and shapes the culture into which we were born, Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* seems much influenced by her history, society and culture in order to create the counter discourse against the history written by colonizer.

Keeping the notion that every text is situated with the certain historical timeframe and is shaped according to the influence of socio political circumstance, M.H. Abrams in his book *Glossary of Literary Terms* views:

A literary text is said by New Historicists to be "embedded" in its context, in a constant intersection and interchange and with other components inside the network of institutions, beliefs, and cultural power relations, practices, and products that, in their ensemble, constitute what we call history, New Historicists commonly regard the conceptual "boundaries" by which [. . .] to be a construct of post Renaissance ideological formations. (184-85)

For Abrams, New Historicists view that every text has the influence of network of institutions, beliefs and cultural power. In this regard H. Abram Vesser comments, "Literary and non-literary texts circulate inseparably. History and literature have been endlessly juxtaposed before now, but never in quite so insouciant fashion" (16). Human beings cannot be free from the social, cultural, political and economic condition of their time. So, those literary texts are also influenced by their factors.

Friedrich Nietzsche, the pioneer of deconstruction, questions the relation of language to truth. According to him language never expresses truth. Language is used by human beings to create the so-called truth for their own survival but it fails to capture the real essence. He advocates that one should suspend the assumption that language has truth. Use of language is guided by the 'will to power'. Nietzsche further states, "Truth is a mobile army a metaphor, metonymy and morphemes" (636).

Histories too are guided by the constructed truths by power and the fictions too are not merely a fantasy or imagination, rather there is too the influence of facts incidents of historical timeframe. Tara Lata is the past, history, culture, myth rituals

and legend of Indian Independence Movement for the narrator Tara Chatterjee. She by relation is great-great-aunt of the narrator. Past, history, culture and ancient heritage are not the source of identity of Third-World people like Tara Chatterjee and writing subject matter but also a medium of expression of resistance of official colonial history made by colonizer. In this regard, she in search of her cultural identity reveals the legend of Tara Lata, rituals and cultures of Bengali community as well as the colonial history of British imperialism. At the end of the novel inspired by the legend of Tara Lata Tara Chatterjee rejoins with her ex-husband Bish Chatterjee.

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 history about legend Tara Lata who has been neglected by colonizer and due to death inside the prison no more facts were available about her. Mukherjee through the fictional accounts reveals the hidden facts of her namesake as if she is rewriting the history of Indian Independent Movement countering the history made by British during colonization. Since the official British history has neglected the hidden facts of Tara Lata and John Mist and reviving the forgotten history by post-colonial authors is a form of resistance against colonial history, assumptions and beliefs about Non-western people and culture.

III. *The Tree Bride* as a Counter against Colonial History

After the discussion and analysis of the text *The Tree Bride* from the perspective of New Historicism, the researcher comes to the conclusion that Bharati Mukherjee by fusing the past and present in the form of fictional writing evokes the history of West Bengal in particular the village of Mishtigunj during the period of British Colonization and India Independence Moment. Such rewriting of history helps to counter the colonial discourses' constructed truth about colonized nation and people. Since no history is completely historical with linear accounts of facts and truth, the power influences the history with regard to the ruler's perspective. The history written by British writers of the time about India excludes the story of the legendary figures of Independence Movement. That is why the stories like Tara Lata and John Mist are untold by the colonizer but Mukherjee evokes the untold stories (historical facts) throughout the fiction since there is historicity with the text and due to the certain influence of social and cultural aspects, the author speaks certain voices through it.

Keeping this play between history and fiction into the consideration, this research finds that Mukherjee counters the constructed truth of colonizer about the colonized nation and its people by rewriting the history of Indian Independence Movement in the form of fiction. Mukherjee by presenting the narrator who, as the storyteller of the Independence Movement's legends from Mishtigunj, reveals the hidden history of John Mist, Tara Lata and Mishtigunj, brings out the hidden truths as well as cruelty of colonization. The narration of 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 figures of John Mist and Tara Lata 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. She had devoted rest of her 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 British Colonizer. There is no historical account of the life and incidents related John Mist and Tara Lata in official British documentation because the colonizer did not want to include the fact that glorifies the colonized.

Through the lives of these two legends, protagonist Tara Chatterjee revives her past heritage and cultural identity as she dreams of the past that could reveal the truth and historical facts. The story of legendary figures in *The Tree Bride* itself is a powerful medium of discourse that creates the fact or reality about colonial India. As a typical post-colonial author, Mukherjee has tried to resist the colonial discourse and superior mentality by evoking her own history culture, myths and legends with significant outlook as a source of cultural identity of native people. Bharati Mukherjee presents the counter discourse just opposite than colonial literature by blending facts and fiction.

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