

## **Chapter I: Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* as a Feminist Writing**

Bharati Mukherjee, born in Calcutta in 1940, is an Indo-American immigrant novelist and short story writer. Mukherjee has been a Professor in English at the University of California and a Fellow of the American Academy since 1993. She has authored a number of fictions and short stories that depict her Indian heritage as well as her fugitive experience in the new locations having different socio-cultural values to that in India. Besides depicting impacts of new cultures on the immigrants in new locations, her writings have to do with marginalization and sufferings of females that has not been taken into account by Western feminism. Basically, Mukherjee's fictions and short stories are accounts of experience of third world females such as of India and other non-western parts of the world. Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* (1993) is a feminist writing that depicts her Indian heritage, predicaments of Indian people in multi socio-cultural British colonial India and double marginalization of Indian women during British colonialism in India.

In *The Holder of the World*, Hannah Easton is a representative of western females constructed by Mukherjee as the protagonist of the fiction. She experiences diverse socio-cultural British colonial India in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. Beigh Masters, a western female, narrates the story of the fiction who acts as the mouthpiece of Mukherjee. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband Venn Iyer. Beigh Masters creates the story of Hannah Easton, a woman born in New England three hundred years ago.

According to Beigh Masters' narration, Hannah Easton brought up in Salem, migrates to England and marries an Englishman Gabriel Legge, and migrates to India with him. In India, after the death of her husband, she becomes mistress of an Indian

*Raja* Jadav Singh and suffers a lot in British colonial multicultural India. After the assassination of her lover Jadav Singh in a religious riot between Hindus and Muslims, Hannah Easton returns to her native country, New England with the pregnancy resulted from her relation with her lover and lives there as white Pearl herself and her newly born daughter as a non-white Pearl.

Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* is set in the political background during the British colonialism in India. It deals with personal, social, and political issues focusing on double marginalization of Indian women under patriarchal and colonial Indian society. Hannah Easton, a western female, becomes the lover of an Indian Jadav Singh and she adapts solely to the Indian cultural norms and values. But she has an ambivalence position in India due to the difference in the cultural values that are totally different from her own native land. She closely witnesses double marginalization of Indian women with her first hand experience of patriarchal colonial India. Thus, the suffering of Indian women under patriarchal and British colonial India is the major issue raised in the novel.

In *The Holder of the World*, Hannah Easton is preoccupied with individual's search for freedom. Her self-realization ultimately helps her making her own way of reality by challenging male constructed social framework in India. Under the male made social framework, Hannah Easton observes predominant and hegemonic position of males with the help of which males dominate females and the former rule over the latter. Therefore, the search of freedom of Hannah Easton is concerned more with the freedom of women who are double marginalized in Indian society under British colonialism. The fiction, with the experience of Hannah Easton, reveals that Indian females are dominated by patriarchal Indian society and exploited by British colonizers in India.

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee tries to achieve a more open-minded approach to women related issues that the western brand of feminism has not taken into account. Instead of merely explaining the pathetic life-style of Indian women, Mukherjee through her protagonist Hannah Easton tries to reveal predicament of Indian women to a deeper level. Mukherjee gives priority to freedom of women above all things and on the top, her focus is on the freedom of man's life. Moreover, Mukherjee's concern is on suffering of Indian females under patriarchal and colonial India. The most important issue Mukherjee portrays in the novel is the political British colonial scenario and patriarchal society in India that exploits Indian women, to show two layers of marginalization of Indian women.

Mukherjee, in the novel, comes up with the twin themes of freedom: freedom of Indian women and freedom of India. Since the novel is set in the period of British colonialism in India, it depicts how Indian natives are dominated and exploited by the British colonizers. On the top, Mukherjee shows the domination and exploitation of Indian females by revealing the adverse effects of British colonialism in India. The Indian females are subjugated to double marginalization in colonial India. Therefore, the novel deals with the history of British colonial India with its multicultural and religious fundamentalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century with the romantic love affair between Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh, king of Devgad.

Hannah Easton suffers a lot in diverse socio-cultural and British colonial India before and after the assassination of her lover, Jadav Singh, in a religious riot between Hindus and Muslims. In this sense, Hannah Easton experiences double marginalization in India. To show the double marginalization of third world women, Mukherjee weaves the story of western female Hannah Easton who experiences domination by male dominated Indian society as well as British colonizers in India

and finally struggles against them for the freedom of Indian women in particular and for the third world women in general.

Mukherjee, in *The Holder of the World*, exploits lots of oriental imagery to focus on the third world society. The objects employed in the novel by narrator Beigh Masters are iconic references to the mundane and mythical objects of the Indian society. Mukherjee takes reference of Hindu Mythology the *Ramayan* to show the domination of Sita, the protagonist, in male chauvinistic Indian society. The literary imagination in the novel is powerfully based on the oriental objects and story to give the identity of the third world women.

The novel has the postmodern setting in a circular framework. It has a circular narrative due to the circularity in the setting itself. Plot setting of the novel is in New England, England, British colonial India and finally again in New England. This framework of setting of the novel ruptures the linearity of narration. However, the major setting of the novel is in British colonial India with the focus on the suffering of female character, Hannah Easton, under patriarchal male chauvinistic and British colonial Indian society. The major female character Hannah Easton suffers under this politico-cultural society and observes pathetic situation of Indian females due to patriarchy and colonialism in India and finally goes against such anti-female situation of Indian society and calls for freedom of third world women. In the course of her revolt, she challenges patriarchal notions that go against the freedom of females and denounces British colonialism in India being herself a bold and revolutionary woman. It means that she dares to question rigid anti-female social notions in India and denounce exploitative British colonialism in India.

*The Holder of the World* is fabricated from the third world feministic perspective to challenge western brand of feminism to give voice to the sidelined and suffered females particularly in India and whole females of third world in general. Mukherjee creates western female protagonist, Hannah Easton, who suffers dual domination and finally critiques western feminism for not addressing problems of third world females.

The openendedness to the story and its focus on the suffering of third world women brand the present novel a postmodern feminist writing. The protagonist, Hannah Easton, finally returns to her native land pregnant with her lover's baby and lives in Salem. The story of Hannah Easton in the fiction does not offer a final resolution and hence is a postmodern feminist writing.

In *The Holder of the World*, Indian Hindu as well as Muslim cultures with their multiple norms and values are foregrounded with the frequent references from the Hindu scriptures *Ramayana*, *Geeta* and Muslim scripture *Quran*. In the novel, Mukherjee fictionalizes a puritan Western woman's journey to India, her relation with a Hindu *Raja* Jadav Singh as her lover and an appointment of an Indian girl Bhagmati as her servant. In India, Hannah Easton adapts to Indian culture solely and she herself faces the bitter reality of Indian women living in diverse socio-cultural British colonial India. Finally, Hannah Easton realizes that there is no hierarchy between her and Bhagmati, her servant living in the same politico- culture situation and facing the same reality together. Mukherjee in the fiction reveals multi-culturalism in terms of social norms and religion and its adverse effects on Indian women. Similarly, the author also exposes the adverse effects of British colonialism in India and thereby she critiques Western feminism with the experience of those effects by her western

protagonist Hannah Easton in the non- western location India. The researcher attempts to explore why Mukherjee challenges 'Western' feminism.

Mukherjee critiques Western feminism through the portrayal of her Western female protagonist and non- western female Bhagmati in order to resist ethnocentrism in Western Feminism and to acknowledge the heterogeneity, diversity and differences of Third world women in relation to their race, caste, class, and location.

The sole basis for this research is textual analysis of Mukharjee's *The Holder of the World* from the perspective of the third world feminism developed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Uma Narayan , Ketu Katrak, and Gayatri C. Spivak. The study takes the Indian politico-cultural aspects and its negative impact on Indian women as the core that is fictionalized in the novel.

The objective of this research is to explore Indian patriarchy, social norms and values at the background of Hindu and Muslim religion that has been excluded in Western feminism for exploitation of third world women. This project aims at discovering Western concept of feminism, exploring the suffering of Indian women during British colonialism under patriarchal India and establishing harmony between man and woman with the emphasis on the equal importance of both for their co-existence.

This study significantly acknowledges politico-cultural and socio-economic aspects of people in India. It strongly supports the issue of 'understanding others.' Similarly, unlike Western concept of homogeneity and universality of women all over the globe, it asserts heterogeneity and differences of women living in socio-economic and politico-cultural diversity in India and their situation accordingly. It unveils the percussions of British colonialism in India and the pathetic situation of Indian women

emanated from it during colonialism. Finally, the study is significant at establishing man- woman solidarity by eschewing the concept of man- woman antagonism in "Western" feminism.

Regarding *The Holder of the World*, various critics posited their different critical responses since its publication in 1993. In this connection, Sandhya Rao Mehta puts her view regarding the protagonist, Hannah Easton, and her intention of journey to the orient. In her own words:

Hannah Easton 's voyage to the orient is predetermined truth which effectively voices and manifests the latent tensions, aspirations and ambition of the protagonist. [. . .] she becomes an expatriate as a result of a quest for a vital life of feeling of emotions. [. . .] an attempt to escape from the limitations and claustrophobic influence of the native world. (qtd. in Dhawan 194)

According to Mehta, Hannah Easton becomes an expatriate to escape from her uncongenial native world in search of a vital life in India. Nevertheless, the intention of Mukharjee in creating her protagonist is more than that. Mukharjee comments on Western concept of feminism through the experience of the western protagonist Hannah Easton.

Regarding Hannah Easton and her bitter experience in India, Mehta says, "[H]er courtship with the Raja indicates a relationship based entirely on Indian, Eastern rules morality with reference to the life left behind" (qtd.in Dhawan 197). With Indian lover Hannah Easton experience s " a life of limitless possibilities , of passion and sensuous pleasures underwent in the English world" (qtd. in Dhawan 197). Her encounter with Mughal Emperor after the death of her lover leaves her "to

the world of the mysterious east , assuming as she has now an entirely Indian physical garb as well as Indian values and morality" (qtd. in Dhawan 197). The British colonialism in India ignites the religious riot. *Raja* becomes the victim of this riot and is assassinated with several others. From that time onwards, Hannah Easton faces the bitter reality of British colonialism at large extent. Mehta critically points out the percussions of British colonialism in India and its adverse effects on Indian women including Hannah Easton during British colonialism.

Paul Brian, a literary critic, puts his views focusing on subject matter and style of the novel. According to him, "*The Holder of the World* is a fantastic historical novel set in a science fictional framework .[. . .] a puritan white lady takes her journey to India where she becomes the devoted lover of an East Indian *Raja*" (Brians114) . Brians points out the structure of the novel and Hannah Easton's experience of Indian culture with her lover but she does not raise the issue of Hannah Easton's experience of adverse effects of British colonialism as well as that of on Indian women. It tends to true that the narrator's research to construct the story of the protagonist brands the novel a science fiction. Brians comments that the novel is fantastically a historical but she does not talk about the cultural diversity in India and predicament of Indian women in such female uncongenial culture.

Ethan Casey comments on the thematic aspect and historicity of the novel. Casey puts the theme of *The Holder of the World* as "meeting and mixing of peoples" (Para. 10). She further says, "[I]t is an audacious feminist writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) [. . .] an attempt to narrate early modern history through [. . .] reconstructed conscious of a postmodern protagonist" (Para.10). According to Casey, the novel is feminist rewriting in the structure of *The Scarlet*



*Letter* that deals with the suffering of female protagonist, Hester Prynne in rigid Puritan New England world. Similarly, *The Holder of the World* is about Hannah Easton's suffering in diverse politico- cultural Indian world. Casey further says that the novel is about colonialism, Hindus and Muslims, Indians or East Indian people, interracial relationship as well as love and romance. In her own words: "[I]t is a feminist and very contemporary rewriting of the story of British imperialism" (Para 3). Casey raises the prominent issues of British colonialism in India but she does not talk about the adverse effects of colonialism, racial conflict and cultural diversity on Indian women. It is a pertinent issue to unveil the percussions of aforementioned aspects from the perspective of third world feminists in India.

C.L Chua's view regarding the novel is related to cultural, historical and ethnic diversity in India. This view challenges the essentialist notion of western feminism regarding homogeneity of females all over the globe. Chua views that "*The Holder of the World* challenges its readers' notion of discrete historical periods, culture, and ethnicities" (Para.6). The concept of Western feminism does not assert the cultural, historical, and ethnical diversity in third world and its impacts on women accordingly. It is necessary to read the present novel from the perspective of third world feminism to bring the cultural and political diversity on the surface in order to foreground multiculturalism and its impacts on third world women.

Commenting on the construction of British colonial history in India, Parmeswaran says, "[I]n constructing a piece of Raj history, Mukherjee joins other novelists from her native India, such as Manohar Malgonkar (*The Princes, The Devil's Wind*), Kamala Markandaya (*The Golden Honeycomb*), and more recently Gita Mehta (*Raj*)" (637). These lines show that Mukherjee's politics of writing *The*

*Holder of the World* is to foreground the pathetic situation of Indian women through her feminist writing as other Indian feminist novelist has done so. Therefore, the present researcher attempts to explore dilapidating condition of Indian women under patriarchal society and British colonial political scenario in India depicted in Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*.

Continuing the supportive views regarding the novel by various critics, this research explores the politico-culture, and ethnical diversity in India and its adverse effects on Indian women that challenge the concept of western feminism. Unlike western feminists a third world feminist Chandra Talpade Mohanty says, "[W]omen are affected positively or negatively by economic development , policies and this is the basis for the cross- cultural comparison " (Mohanty 30). The researcher employs such concepts of third world feminism to expose cultural diversity and its impacts on Indian women thereby asserting heterogeneity of females.

## **Chapter II. Theoretical Discourse: Third World Feminism**

Feminism is a broad concept that has occupied the socio-political and literary fields. It is a movement that includes ideologies of women's liberation and identity. Feminism sees the oppression and subordination of women in patriarchal society as a political problem and not a consequence of natural law. In modern times, feminism has found different ideologies related to the women's issues depending upon the social structures. Therefore, feminism has been classified into many varieties, with all working for the construction of female identity. The patriarchal social system always considered women as subordinate and subsidiary human beings. Women are never included in power politics nor are they involved in decision-making process. Being kept in the home confinements, women are rarely seen as political animal which should have been taken as their inborn quality as that of men. Even today, in most places of globe, the inequality existing between men and women are considered practically unimportant and theoretically uninteresting. Women are exploited and treated as mute animals. In order to change such derogatory concepts regarding women, women in the past were making their individual efforts gradually took the form of movement of women's liberation that was later named as 'feminism.'

The liberal feminists claim that since women too are rational being like men, they should be given the same legal and political rights. In Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of Rights of Women', liberal feminism "concentrates on rights in the public sphere [. . .] it assumes that the justice of its cause will ensure its success and that men will have no reason to oppose it" (2).

Focusing on the economical aspects, the Marxist feminists argue that the key to women's liberation is their entry into the paid labor market and their involvement

in the class struggle. According to them, economic dependency is the major cause of women's oppression and only in communist society; this dependency will be reduced by involving women in production system.

Radical feminists contend verities of issues and arguments regarding their domination under patriarchal society. They attempted to draw lines between biologically determined behaviors and culturally determined behaviors in order to free both men and women from their previous narrow gender roles. Therefore, they oppose the gender-based discrimination in male dominated patriarchal society. Because of biological differences, it constructs social hierarchical differences of male masculine and female as feminine. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir says, "[O]ne is not born woman, one becomes one [. . .] she is a cultural construct rather than the biological one" (*The Second Sex* 5-6).

There are some linguistic feminists who posit that women are facing discrimination due to the language structure of patriarchy. They argue that the language they use is male-dominated and hence it helps the female domination by males. In this regard, linguistic feminist Helen Cixous contends that "social language depends on gendered binary oppositions. The feminine is always the other or the negative in any hierarchies which society constitute" (39). It means that women's difference from men is not only social but also linguistic.

Most of the western feminists assert homogeneity of all females of the globe and attack the political theory of marginalizing women. They always demand equality and liberation from domination and marginalization by fighting against patriarchal domination and gender inequality asserting homogeneity of all the women across the world regardless of class, race or location as sisters in the struggle, a homogeneous

group sharing same subordinations. But recently, feminism itself has been accused of universalizing the assumptions and needs of white women in Europe and America and largely ignoring the very different perspectives of black, ethnic and third world women. Therefore, the third world feminists criticize the western feminism for making of western women as the norm for all women all over the world concealing the vast differences among women of different parts of the globe. They assert the heterogeneity of the women and argue that the feminists should keep the issues of the more marginalized at the center.

The feminists working on the issues of race, ethnicity and colonialism find that western feminism has become ‘white feminism’ that defines the concept of power relation as that of men and women experiencing a shared domination. The black and third world feminists argue that the “only focus upon gendered power and viewing women as a homogeneous group” shadows the “difference between women” (Beasley 76). According to them, the white women are dominated only from white men, but black women are not only dominated from black men but also from white men and white women. Therefore, they are doubly marginalized. The case is similar for colonized third world women too. The marginalization of third world women is due to patriarchal oppression and colonial domination. Such types of double marginalization cannot find commonality in western feminism which is concerned only with gendered discrimination, fight for sexual equality and control over own sexuality.

During the 1980s, many feminists from third world such as Chandra Talpade Mohanti and Sara Suleri began to argue that “Western feminism, which had assumed that gender overrode cultural differences to create a universal category of the

womanly or feminine, was operating from hidden, universalist assumption with a middleclass, Euro-centric bias” (qtd. In Ashcroft et al. 102). It is in this point that the third world feminists find an elision between ‘women’ as discursively constructed group and ‘women’ as material subject of their own history. They charged western feminism that it failed to account adequately with the experience of third world women. The western feminist assumption that all of us the same gender across classes and cultures are socially constituted as a homogeneous group is criticized by these third world feminists. They contend that the homogeneity of women is produced not on the basis of biological essentials. In this regard, Mohanti argues that “the discursively consensual homogeneity of ‘women’ as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women” (262). This means that the third world feminists find an elision between ‘women’ as a discursively constructed group and ‘women’ as material subject of their own history.

When western feminism establishes a norm for homogeneity based on shared oppression, the ‘third world women’ are made the others who have to follow these norms. The western feminist texts depict such third world ‘other’ women as singular, monolithic subject often depicting the western women as primary referent and codifying the other as non-western. Mohanty contends that the assumption of women as an already constituted coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location and a homogeneous notion of the oppression of women as a group produces the image of an average third world women. In her own words:

This average third world woman [represented by the western feminism] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine

gender (read: sexually constrained) and being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.) [...] in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions.

(261)

The third world women is required to exhibit her 'difference' from the primary referent of western feminism and this difference sets up an implicit cultural hierarchy in which inevitably the 'native woman' suffers in contrast to her western sibling.

Similarly, other pioneer feminist Uma Narayan contends that "commitments to a trans-national and global feminism require that western feminist refrain from buying into historically inaccurate and politically dangerous picture of third world traditions" (Narayan, Preface x). Narayan asserts that western feminism sidelined the third world traditions. This research employs the concept of third world feminism that departed from western feminism by exploring the double marginalization of Indian women under British colonialism and diverse cultural patriarchal society in India.

The recent third world feminists have developed a brand of feminism that has dynamic discursive field to address the issues of race, gender, economic status, geographical location, etc as well as double marginalized women's oppressions, critic their false representation made by the western feminism and address their resistance movements and identity struggle. Ella Sohat says, "[W]hat all these instances share is the semiotic principle that something is 'standing for' something else, or that some person or group is speaking on behalf of some other person or group" (qtd. in Bhari 204). Gayatri Spivak suggests that there are two principle ways of representing: "to

tread in someone's shoes" and "placing there" (qtd. in Bhari 204). Thus, representing is done in two ways: by proxy and portrait. The relation between these two modes of representation is the ground of much contestation in postcolonial debates.

Fields such as women's studies and postcolonial studies have arisen in response to the absence or unavailability of the perspectives of women, racial minorities and marginalized cultures in historical account. "This lack of representation is paralleled in the political, economic, and legal spheres. When minorities and others are represented, "the representation may effectively exist instead of rather than in correspondence to any real thing" (Bhari 204). Spivak contends that "speaking for women does not always entail speaking for the marginalized or silenced in general" (Bhari 205). Even within the feminist project, then, there is no guarantee that the perspective of the 'Third World woman' will be represented.

Western feminist discourse is seen as 'neo-Orientalism' by many postcolonial theorists mainly because it claims to represent the 'third world woman' paradoxically silencing her in the 'pious' attempt to represent or speak for her. Spivak, in her essay "Can Subaltern Speak?", famously elaborates some contexts wherein contesting representational systems violently displaces the figure of 'gendered subaltern'. In this context she writes, "[B]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (306).

Spivak first talks about the subaltern in general, and then the gendered subaltern. 'Subaltern'—to denote inferior rank—is a term adopted by Antonio Gramsci to refer those groups in societies who are subjected to hegemony of ruling



class, that includes peasants, workers, women or other dominated groups. The term 'subaltern' has been adapted to post-colonial studies from the work of Subaltern Studies group of historians who aimed to promote the systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. The concept of the subaltern in general meant to resist the elite domination, to cut across several kinds of political and cultural binaries: colonialism vs. nationalism, or imperialism vs. indigenous. According to Ranjit Guha, the term subaltern denotes "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way" (Guha vii). He argues that subaltern studies aims at to study subordination by understanding the binary relationship with dominance, and to examine the subaltern "as an objective assessment of the role of the elite and as a critique of elitist interpretations of that role" (vii). Guha argues that the subaltern group is invariably overlooked in studies of political and cultural change.

Spivak made the term famous by asking the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" She contends:

The true subaltern group whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual [. . .]. How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (27)

One cannot construct a category of the subaltern that has an effective voice clearly and unproblematically identifiable as such, a voice that does not at the same time occupy many other possible speaking positions.

Spivak further discusses the problems of the category of the subaltern by studying the case of gendered subjects and Indian women in particular and says that the trace of sexual difference is doubly effected, since “both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant” and she concludes that “if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is more deeply in shadow [. . .]” (28). She does not however mean that there is no way in which oppressed or politically marginalized groups can voice their resistance, or that the subaltern only has a dominant language or a dominant voice in which to be heard. Her target is the concept of an unproblematically constituted subaltern identity, rather than the subaltern subject’s ability to give voice to political concerns. She wants to argue that no act of dissent or resistance occurs on behalf of an essential subaltern subject entirely separate from the dominant discourse that provides the language and the conceptual categories with which the subaltern voice speaks. In most cases, the dominant language or mode of representation is appropriated so that the marginal voice can be heard as seen in the cases of postcolonial discourses.

When western feminism establishes a norm for homogeneity based on shared oppression, the ‘third world women’ are made the others who have to follow these norms. Therefore, third world feminists think that they are required to exhibit their ‘difference’ from the primary referent of western feminism and “[T]his consciousness of difference [. . .] sets up an implicit cultural hierarchy wherein almost inevitably the

‘native woman’ suffers in contrast to her western sibling” (Gandhi 85). Hence, homogeneity or sisterhood of females asserted in western feminism is criticized by third world feminists as a medium to disguise their hidden, unpleasant ideology of ‘separatism’. Similarly, the concept of ‘third world woman’ is regarded as discursively constructed, a hegemonic discourse of west—form of orientalism, a hierarchical way of western women to look at the non-western women.

Therefore, focusing and insisting on the heterogeneity of the lives of third world women, third world feminism searches for the need of an inter-related analysis that does not limit gender-based definition of females and does not bypass the females of different class, race, social status and, ethnicity in feminist analysis.

### **Chapter III. Critique of Western Feminism: A Study of Mukherjee's**

#### ***The Holder of the World***

##### Hannah Easton as a Western Female

In comparison to non-western people, western people are more guided by material prosperity. The marriage system/culture and religious practices of western people are also different from that in the non-western location. Researches show that the tendency of divorce is high and there is different system of marriage in western culture. The husband-wife relation in western culture seems to be more guided by individual's vested interest and selfishness rather than by pure love between them. In *The Holder of the World*, Hannah Easton is a western female who migrates to India with the representation of her western norms and values.

Hannah Easton was born in the forest of Massachusetts in the New England colonies in 1670. A unique woman undreamed in Puritan society, Hannah Easton, at the age of 15 moves to Salem with her adoptive parents after the death of her father and running off her mother with a lover from Nipmuc tribe. Hannah Easton, a vital, inquisitive, and awake to her own possibilities, migrates to England and then to India after her marriage with an Englishman Gabriel Legge. In this context, Beigh Masters narrates:

And I who have studied Hannah's life nearly as closely as I have studied my own would say that Hannah Easton, whatever the name she carried in Massachusetts, in England, in India or even into history to this very day, loved her mother more profoundly than any daughter has ever loved a mother. (30)

Above lines show that the birthplace of Hannah Easton is Massachusetts, a western location and she migrates to England, marries to Englishman and finally migrates to India with her husband.

Hannah Easton is in cross roads of many worlds in a new location in India due to her own western culture. She represents Salem culture of witch trials. In addition, she is a prisoner like the captives of New Englanders during the colonial plantations in New England. In this connection, Beigh Masters says:

She might have been a prisoner; they might have been her tender guardians. The fact is, she stayed in Salem with the Fitches through the famous witch trials, in which she played a small role as counselor of women who fled marriages and husbands they no longer understood.

(61)

Hannah Easton, through the terrible winter of 1691, remained indoors and still a maiden at her twenty-one with slim expectations of being married.

Hannah Easton's Oddness, though, are no impediment to marriage with dashing adventurer Gabriel Legge. However, she represents western culture of marriage as she satisfies on the death of her husband Gabriel Legge. In comparison to marital relation of non-west, in western culture majority of husband-wife relations are weak and tend to divorce due to slim marital faith between them. Materialism and selfishness are major factors for western people to sustain their marital status. Hannah Easton represents the same culture and it becomes obvious when Beigh Masters says, "[S]he did not believe him, but she, too, longed for escape" (67). Hannah Easton marries to Gabriel Legge out of her motive of escaping from her Puritan world rather

than her belief and love for Gabriel Legge. Her motive of marrying Gabriel Legge seems to be guided by her self-interest of migrating India with him.

Hannah Easton represents physical and sexual passionate western world. In the words of Beigh Masters, “[S]ince she was to write so movingly of sexual passion in her later years, in a voice that is unique among women in her time and place, I have tried to read carefully between the lines of all her correspondence” (76). Hannah Easton’s written record is one of long chronicle of discoveries and her curiosity advances to every knowledge. She wants to earn her dignity rather than inherit it. Therefore, she wants to move ahead without any sense of regret. Beigh Masters says, “[I]f status had mattered to Hannah, she would have stayed in Stepney. Her curiosity was robust. She wanted to earn, not inherit, dignity. She moved on without regrets” (90).

Although Hannah Easton is in India, she still possesses the power of western culture. Her character is shaped by her mother Rebecca. In the words of Beigh Masters:

Hannah was still alert to the power of the jungle. She did not fear the unknown or the unexplored. Her character was shaped on romps with Rebecca in the woods around Brookfield. And she needed time to sort out her errands—oh, so many errands!—in this vast new jungle. (104-5)

Hannah Easton seems to be richer than the others are and has a stronger sense of hierarchy among the people where she resides. She is still unready, unformed and afraid to discover herself disloyal. She maintains the hierarchy between herself and her Indian servant girl Bhagmati in India. Beigh Masters says, “[T]hat’s why she had

Bhagmati sleep on a pallet in the middle of the balcony, just outside her bedroom door” (135).

By representing the culture of love and marriage of the west, Hannah Easton keeps *Raja* as her lover after the death of her husband. Therefore, she becomes the passionate lover of Jadav Singh in India. In the words of Beigh Masters, “[S]he wanted *Raja* and nothing else, she would sacrifice anything for his touch and love they made” (229).

Since Hannah Easton preoccupies with the western norms and values, she feels herself as a stranger in a new location of India. In Beigh Master’s words, “Hannah was a stranger to all these conventions. [. . .] It would be bleak, gray, dismal life, she feared, after some excitements and colors and violence of the Coromandel Coast” (198). She remembers the scalping, the brandings, the blown away faces of her native land Salem and her practiced surgeries in New England. Therefore, “Hannah felt she had entered a world whose simplest rules about the saintly and the villainous were unknown to her” (225). Due to the strong impacts of western culture on Hannah Easton, she faces difficulties in Indian culture and even feels uncongenial environment to stay with her lover in her later days. Thus, “With Jadav Singh, she’d finally accepted how inappropriate it was in India—how fatal—to cling, as White Towns tenaciously did, to Europe’s rules. She was no longer the woman she had been in Salem or London. [. . .] She was no longer a wife. She was the *bibi*” (234). Thus, love made Hannah Easton a selfish guardian of privacy and just engages in love with her lover out of her sexual passion without caring the responsibilities of *Raja* towards his subjects.

Hannah Easton's representation of western culture becomes obvious when *Raja's* mother aggressively reprimands Hannah Easton, "[H]er white, casteless hands had touched him, touched blood, her hands that had touched beef; even if she brought him back from yam's grip, what sort of half-human monster would he be" (252)? In the response, representing the woman of western culture Hannah Easton says, "I am neither wife nor queen [. . .] A *bibi* had the right, the duty, to live for love. Gabriel's black *bibi* had seized happiness for Gabriel and for herself; a *bibi* had the power to laugh in the face of a *firangi* wife" (254).

About the end of the story, Hannah Easton wants to preserve her western culture. She wants herself to be buried after her death because she is a Christian and in Christian culture, dead bodies are not cremated. In this connection, Beigh Masters narrates, "Hannah named her a Christian, to be buried and not cremated, in order to preserve her body as a carrying case. [. . .] If Hannah had carried the gem back to the Coast, and then to America, it would have turned up by now" (283-84).

Therefore, Hannah Easton comes from western location with her own cultural practices. She represents western culture of marriage, love, and marital relation between husband and wife. She possesses western sexual and material passion and so lives in India with her lover for the sake of love. Finally, she preserves her western culture and returns back to her own native land.

#### Patriarchal Society and British Colonialism in India

Patriarchal society constructs the binaries of male and female and the former rules over the latter. In such binaries, male has good connotations such as rational, independent, active, strong, sensible, and so on, whereas female is attributed by negative connotations such as emotional, dependent, passive, weak, receptive, and so



on. In patriarchal society, by creating such binary oppositions between male and female, males consider themselves as the guardians/protector of females and construct the notion that in absence of males females are incomplete and insecure. Males as the guardians of females control females by means of different male-made social notions for females and exploit them as commodities. Under such patriarchal society females are confined within the four walls of a house, their emotions are suppressed and their roles are limited. Similarly, under the norms of different religion, females are made to adopt different practices that are utterly unfavorable for females. Practice of *sati* and practice of *burkah* by females are the examples of female dominations in the community of Hindu and Muslim religions respectively in India. Therefore, the patriarchal impositions of norms and values on women are highly oppressive and hegemonic.

Regarding the colonial politics and patriarchal culture in third world, Uma Narayan posits, “I point to the ways in which Third-World feminist contestations are responses to problems women confront within a variety of Third-World national contexts, and an integral part of the political debates and disputes within these nations” (Preface ix). Contrasting between western culture and third world culture, Narayan further says:

I argue that the charge of “Westernization” is intimately connected to the contrasting views of “Western culture” and specific Third-World “cultures” that were constructed in colonial times, drawing attention to the ideological and problematic nature of these characterizations of “culture.” (Preface ix)

Narayan draws attention to the selective, self-serving, and shifting ways in which certain social changes in Third-World contexts are regarded as innocuous and consonant with “preserving our culture.”

Mukherjee, in *The Holder of the World*, enshrines the notion of patriarchy in India with different male-made norms for females in order to critique western feminism and to give voice to the double marginalized Indian women. She exposes practice of polygamy in India to show the evils of patriarchy. The system of polygamy in India is different to that of in western culture. In the words of Beigh Masters, “[A]fter thirty-eight years of barrenness [. . .] his father had taken on a second wife, the very young, very beautiful daughter of a minor *Raja*.” (231). After marrying the second wife, Jadav Singh’s father banishes his first wife. It is a great injustice for the females in India from the part of males in Indian patriarchal society.

Male chauvinism in India is exposed through the story of Sita from a Hindu mythology the *Ramayan*. Sita suffers a lot under this male dominated patriarchal society. Rama suspects Sita’s purity and fidelity when she is carried to Lanka by Ravan is brought back by Rama. Therefore, Rama banishes Sita to the Jungle at the time of her pregnancy out of his male chauvinistic patriarchal society. “Distrust, his own and that of his advisers, drives him to banish Sita, now pregnant with twin sons, to the forest” (177).

Mukherjee explores the stories of women belonging to different religion, status, and age groups in order to show the different ways of domination of Indian women under patriarchy in different community. Revealing linguistic, economic, and other cultural aspects of Indian society, Beigh Masters narrates:

The locals were fisherfolk and boatmen, mostly Hindu with Muslim overlords. [ . . . ] Belonged to a caste if he was Hindu, a right-hand or left-hand caste, and everyone was either Shia or Sunni if he was Muslim. They all spoke different languages, they owed fidelity to different masters, they worshiped different gods, and their ancestors had come from different countries. (100)

Above lines shows the various societies of Indian people in terms of profession, class, caste, religion, and language. The social construction in the patriarchal mind in such societies is so rigid that it does not think other than what the conservative norms and values dictate. In such patriarchal society, father represents the rigid and blind follower of conservative male dominated norms and an oppressive male who feels superior while dominating the opposite sex.

In multicultural India, Hindus and Muslims are major religions and the rigid norms of respective religions assist the patriarchy in India. For Indian women “the idea of Hinduism was vaguely frightening and even more vaguely alluring to Hannah” (219). Under this vaguely defined Hinduism, females become victim of patriarchal society. They should practice of *sati* and worship male sex organ. Beigh Masters says, “[T]hey worshiped the male sex organ; they worshiped an elephant headed, fat-boy god. They had more gods than people, and, god knew, they had enough people” (219). In Muslim religion in India, the Muslim girls have to hide themselves under the *burkah* whenever they go outside in order to hide themselves from the males. Regarding the restrictions in Muslim and taboos in Hinduism, Beigh Masters says, “[M]uslims had restrictions, which were noble and manly; Hindus had taboos, which were superstitious and cowardly” (219). Under such restrictions and taboos in Indian

patriarchal society, Indian women become the subjects of exploitation, domination, and marginalization by males in India.

*The Holder of the World* traces the history of British colonialism in India in the early-seventeenth century. The Britishers entered into India as businessmen at the beginning of the seventeenth century and gradually expanded their power to colonize India. This was the time when British East India Company established in India to challenge the Dutch monopoly over spice trade in India. In the context of British colonialism in India, Alison Blunt says, “[T]he colonial and Indian exhibition was widely reported throughout the empire, helping distant British subjects in their imperial homes to imagine the links between their own imperial domesticity and a metropolitan, domestic imperialism” (422). Regarding the British colonialism Beigh Masters puts, “English colonists and certainly for Indian Shachems, however, the 1660s was a win or die” (26). The Britishers in the name of British Indian Company struggled for the right to trade in India in the early 1600s. By the late 1700s, the established trade firms of Britishers backed by the British army. Regarding the Britishers’ trade in India, Beigh Masters says, “[T]here was wealth and trade and culture, history and the great common pulse of humanity that surged from the streets of London” (73). Beigh Masters’ narration regarding British colonialism obviously shows that the British colonizers in India are supported by their native country England.

In *The Holder of the World*, it is depicted that British colonialism had strong influence on the sound mobility and interaction between castes and classes in India. In the words of James Clifford, “[T]he domestic and imperial power of British women in India was thought to rely on their knowledge of imperial domesticity and their

successful management of Indian servants” (431). Therefore, there is still the legacy of British colonialism in India in modern days. In the same context, Beigh Masters says, “Fort St. George, Fort St. Sebastian and all their related remnants of English and Portuguese colonialism are now located in the northern outskirts of the modern city of Madras” (95). This extract obviously shows the British and Portuguese colonialism in India in the past.

#### Double Marginalization of Indian women: Domination from Patriarchy and Domination from Colonizers

Third world women and their double subjugation resulted from the patriarchal oppression and colonial exploitation which do not find place in western feminism. Third world women are considered unimportant and invisible by the imperialists. They look at the third world women only as a childbearing machine. Third world women's sexuality has become the side of hegemonic discourses of western feminism. The third world or colonized women are even more exploited by the imperialists than the colonized men. In patriarchal third world, society males never consider the females of any importance and hence are treated as mute domestic animals. These women under patriarchy are considered to be saved and are limited to household works. On the other hand, colonizers look at the colonized women as fantasy, imaginary, and unimportant objects. A colonized woman does not even provided with basic social and humanitarian rights.

Western feminism regards third world women as a homogenous sociological group characterized by common dependencies or powerlessness. In the global framework of western feminism, “the third world women are typically seen as an undifferentiated group uncomplicated by the heterogeneity that characterize their

conceptual counterpart in the more developed [first] world” (Bhari 212). The supposed homogeneity of third world women on the basis of “sexual difference’ in the form of cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male-dominance leads to the construction of a “similarly reductive and homogenous notion of ‘Third World Difference’ and with the construction of this ‘third world difference’ that “western feminism appropriate and ‘colonize’ the fundamental complexities and conflict which characterize the lives of women of the different class, religion, cultures, races, and castes in these countries” (Mohanty 260).

In the case of third world women, gender differences do not become the crucial emphasis for their liberation from domination as western feminism advocates. In Jonnae Hoolow’s words:

White Feminism’s insistence on ‘sisterhood’ and a sexual politics as the fundamental form of politics, fails to take account of the realities of racism which links black women to black men. Once the cultural differences between women are taken into account, it becomes even more problematic to talk about an authentic female voice. (105)

Hollow views that the women advocating in white feminism generalize from their own experience to the experience of all women who do not see gender as the central side of their oppression, marginalization and domination.

Depending upon class, race, ethnicity, and location, there are many cultural differences and accordingly differences in priorities and emphasis. Therefore, third world women suffers double layer of domination, i.e. from insider patriarchy and from outsider colonizers. Therefore, they struggle together against patriarchal oppression and gender inequality as well as against imperialism or colonialism.

Mohanty claims that when western feminism situates third world women as an oppressed group, western feminism alone becomes the subject of counter history, living third world women in the situation from where they can never rise above the “debilitating generality of their ‘object’ status” (qtd. In Bhari 212). By claiming that they are privileged of “preparing the way for [their] unfortunate sisters [of third world], the western feminists construct an hierarchy between ‘I-Who-Have-Made-It and You-Who-Cannot-Make-it’” (Gandhi 85). Hence, power is exercised in western feminist discourse by implicitly creating binary of ‘first world’ and ‘third world’ in the “process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world” (Mohanty 260).

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee explores multicultural patriarchal British colonial India in its varied forms that ranges from the personal experiences of the western female Hannah Easton to the general pathetic situation of all females in India. In the novel, Mukherjee has presented dilapidated situation of Indian women belonging to different location and period during British colonialism through the eyes of her mouthpiece Beigh Masters, narrator in the novel. Through the mouth of her narrator, Mukherjee represents her own experience of two layers of marginalization under patriarchal British colonial India.

Some feminist critics complain that condemning imperialism or colonialism without critiquing patriarchy is a tactic that seeks to minimize the particular ways gender determines the specific forms of oppression that may take within a specific group. Some postcolonial theorists have convincingly claimed that the blinkered focus on the racial politics inevitably elides the ‘double colonization’ of women under imperial conditions. In the same context, Leela Gandhi contends that such theory

“postulates third world women as victim *par excellence*—the forgotten causality of both imperial ideology, and native and foreign patriarchies” (83). Therefore, most of the third world feminists oppose such focus on racial politics only and refuse “to surrender the third world women to the sentimental and often opportunistic enamourment with ‘marginality’” (Gandhi 84).

Gayatri C. Spivak posits that ‘marginality’ is a buzzword in the cultural critique, and consistent invocation of the marginal has helped reform the canonicity of high Western culture. She finds that “the metropolitan demand for marginality is also troublingly a command which consolidates and names the non-west as interminably marginal” (Gandhi 84). Margin is always at the service of the center and “when a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the center wants an identifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the center” (Spivak 55). The third world woman is arguably housed in an ‘identifiable margin’ and, these critics insist, this accommodation is ultimately unsatisfactory.

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee shows that the Indian women in colonized India experiences twice marginalization. The male-dominated Indian patriarchal society always marginalizes women treating them as inferior to men and the duty of women in third world is to serve men by obeying the male-made rule of confining women within the four walls of the house. The voice of females is suppressed by the males and again oppressed and marginalized by colonizers treating females as colonial objects. Females of India are dictated and ruled by the colonizers in India by the physical as well as so called civilized cultures. Therefore, the colonized women in India are dominated by two giant forces: patriarchal society and outsider colonists.



In the patriarchal social system, the condition of women in India is not different from dumb animals. The women under this social system are dictated to follow male-made hierarchical norms of the society. The patriarchal social system regards female sex as secondary to male sex. Regarding the ‘othering’ of women by men, Simone de Beauvoir says, “[W]oman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not him with reference to her. He is subject, he is the absolute—she is the other” (*The Second Sex* 4-5). Beauvoir further contends that men take women ‘as mysterious’ because men are “unable to penetrate her special experience through any working of sympathy; they are condemned to ignorance of the quality of women’s erotic pleasure, the discomfort of menstruation, and the pains of childbirth” (*Myth and Reality* 977). But these western feminists focus only on the gender issue bypassing other cultural and racial concern of third world women. Therefore, third world feminism takes the issue of their cultural difference and colonial politics under which they suffer double marginalization and oppressions which western feminists do not experience.

In *The Holder of the World*, narrator Beigh Masters narrates how patriarchal society treats women and how they are separated from the world outside. Mukherjee explores cultural aspects of Indian society under which Indian women suffer a lot due to the patriarchal norms and practices. Polygamy is one of the prominent practices in India in male dominated society. Indian women suffer a lot due to this practice of keeping more than one wives by a husband. Regarding the practice of polygamy in India, Beigh Masters narrates:

After thirty-eight years of barrenness (they had, of course, married as children), his father had taken on a second wife, the very young, very

beautiful daughter of a minor Deccani *Raja*. [. . .] He banished his first wife. [. . .] The second wife provided him with extreme and unholy pleasures, and eventually a son. (231)

Above lines tell regarding the second marriage of Jadav Singh's father and his dominated behavior over the first wife. He banishes his first wife since she turns to be barren. It is domination of Indian women in male dominated Indian patriarchal society.

Mukherjee, in *The Holder of the World*, enshrines Sita's story from *Ramayan* to show female domination under male chauvinistic Indian patriarchal society.

Regarding Sita's story, Bhagmati narrates, "Sita pleads and nags Rama into pursuing the animal deep into the forest" (174). After the departure of Rama and not returning for a long time "Sita again driven by new emotions [. . .] forces Laxman to break his pledge to protect her and go off to Rama's rescue" (174). The restricted situation of Indian female and their dependence of male for their protection is obvious from the Bhagmati's following narration:

Before leaving, Laxman draws a white circle around the hut within which Sita is to confine herself, and be safe, while she is alone. [. . .] Sita brings the holy man water and food, but in her dutifulness steps out of the white circle, Ravan seizes her by her long hair, hoist her into a flying chariot, and carries her off to Lanka. (175)

These lines show the restriction constructed for Sita by Laxman for her security in his absence. Symbolically, it is the restriction made by male for female out of their patriarchal notion to make the females feel that they are insecure in the absence of males. It is a patriarchal domination over Indian women by men in Indian society.

Similarly, male chauvinism in India is obvious through Rama's suspicion for Sita's fidelity when she remains under Ravan's captivity in Lanka. In this context, Rama broods: "Ravan has desired you and gazed upon your beauty. Honor has required me, your husband and king, to avenge this evil. Now, the same honor requires me to renounce you" (175). It is the predicament of Indian women where male suspects the fidelity of honest and husband devotee women. To unravel her husband suspicion regarding her fidelity "Sita proves her purity to her husband and to her society in a trial by fire. The god of fire, Agni, embraces her and expels her unscorched" (176). This extract shows the predicament and precarious situation of Indian female who are required to prove their fidelity and purity for the sake of male's satisfaction in male chauvinistic Indian society. Satisfied by Sita's purity, Rama accepts her when "Sita passes the trial by fire [. . .] installs her in the palace as his queen and gladly fulfills his conjugal duties and passions" (176-77).

Again in patriarchal and male chauvinistic society, Rama cannot fully trust on Sita's purity even she has proved it by trial of fire. "At night he lies awake torturing himself with imagined violations Ravan may have committed on Sita. No, it's worse: he can forgive Ravan his rape. His fear is that Sita might have enjoyed it. After the first, no future lover leaves a mark. *Rama doesn't know*" (177). This distrust regarding Sita's purity and fidelity drives Rama to banish her in her pregnancy that makes Sita's life miserable in the dark forest.

With the help of the story of Sita's suffering in patriarchal Indian society, Mukherjee shows the pathetic situation of Indian women due to exploitation and domination over Indian females by males in Indian culture. Mukherjee critiques the western brand of feminism since it does not address such type of cultural aspect under

which third world females become the victim of male in third world patriarchal society.

Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* deals with the two layers of exploitation and domination of Indian females in British colonial India. The western feminism does not understand the domination and exploitation of third world females under colonialism. In the words of Mohanty, "For female subjects, experiences of colonial domination are gender-specific and rooted in the control of female sexuality throughout a woman's life" (9). Regarding the pathetic situation of Indian women during British colonialism in India, Beigh Masters says, "[T]he women robbed, and Bindu bashini herself violated and thrown into the river. She'd been meant to drown. A dishonored Hindu girl couldn't go back home. To have been abused was to have brought shame to the family for its failure to protect her" (223). It shows that an Indian girl, Bindu, suffers twice marginalization: from Hindu religion and British colonizers. Regarding her suffering and double domination under British colonialism in India, Beigh Masters narrates, "Bindu, twice a victim, had run from her family, from her village, from all the familiar taboos and traditions. She kept. She'd found herself a series of servant jobs, starting with buffalo and elephant washing. She'd staved off starvation in a hundred shameful ways" (223-24) .

Above lines show that besides Indian traditions, British colonialism is equally responsible for the victimization of Indian women which is the major concern of third world feminists.

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee exposes corrupted Indian world and sexual exploitation of Indian women under such colonial India. In this context, Beigh Masters says, "[T]he world was rotting; there was no honor, no protection. The people

were innocents, the troops were innocents, but corruption was everywhere. Peace brought profit to everyone, but peace was a curse word on the Coromandel Coast” (238). In colonial India “the raped wives and daughters of limbless parents broke into zanana, beat Bhagmati and set fire to her Hedges shrine” (237-38). Regarding the material exploitation of Indian people and sexual exploitation of Indian female, Beigh Masters says, “[T]he winning soldiers scattered immediately, freed for the day to take their pleasures in neighbouring villages, to loot them, kill the infidels, rape the women, burn the evidence” (245).

Western female protagonist Hannah Easton becomes the victim of sexual exploitation of British colonial agents. Beigh Masters following statement makes it obvious:

He moved so silently, so quickly, his arms were around hers before she could, catch her balance. His open mouth was trying to kiss her, to close over hers before she could scream, and she could hear his low, guttural threats and promises. [. . .] She struggled free now and pushed him away, and Cephus Prynne reestablished his guise of shabby, inoffensive officiousness, casually looking behind him, before she could scream. (121-22)

Above extract shows Hannah Easton’s forcible sexual exploitation by a British colonial agent, Cyphus Prenny. Through this evidence, Mukherjee tries to expose the sexual victimization of Indian females by British colonial agents during colonial period in India.

British colonialism in India fuels a rift between Hindus and Muslims in order to make their mission of colonizing easy and successful. Indian females become

direct victims of Hindu-Muslim riot. Hannah Easton suffers a lot after the assassination of her lover Jadav Singh along with many others in riot between Hindus and Muslims. Describing the death of Jadav Singh in the religious riot, Beigh Masters says, “[I]n battle as in chess, positioning and superior numbers lead to the checkmating, the killing, of the King. *King is fallen!* She heard, early in the battle [. . .]” (245). This shows that Indian females suffer a lot in religious extremities and riots ignited by British colonizers.

Hannah Easton has bitter experiences multiculturalism and British colonialism in strange location of India. In the words of Beigh Masters: “Hannah was a pure product of her time and place, her marriage and her training, exposed to a range of experience that would be extreme even in today’s world” (220). Similarly, Hannah Easton is discriminated in terms caste in India. Raja’s mother ordered, “[T]ake that away [. . .] meaning the white woman’s hand, which had already polluted her son’s caste [. . .]” (250). Queen mother aggressively says, “[T]his woman has taken his manhood. He has become a woman, so let him die in a woman’s palace” (251). Queen mother charges Hannah Easton as a castles white woman whose touch to Raja has brought misfortune on him. She further adds that Hannah Easton’s hand that touched beef has made the king half-human monster on touching Raja by this hand. This shows extreme degree of discrimination of Hannah in terms of caste in India.

Hannah Easton had not been raised in the world of multiculturalism and inequalities as in India. Therefore, “[T]he vast inequalities, as well as the injustice and superstitions of India, seemed to her unnatural and unbearable” (237). Hannah Easton, for the first time, knows “the contradictions of a passionate nature. She wanted to run down to the interior courtyard, where the wounded and the dying and breast-beating

parents, wives and husbands were congregated” (237). Hannah Easton adopting in Indian culture feels her at risk from the British colonizers due to her western culture. In this connection, Beigh Masters says, “[A]mid the bodies, Hannah lay across Bhagmati, their saris giving away their religion and putting them both at risk” (245). British colonizers in India want to expand their own culture. Therefore, they punish western females if they practice Indian culture.

Hannah Easton has her first hand experience of atrocities of British colonialism, multiculturalism, and religious riot in India and the adverse affects of these aspects on Indian women. She wants to meet and explain all these atrocities to ruler Aurangzeb in order to liberate Indian women. Therefore, she flounces into the war camp with Bhagmati in search of Emperor so that she could meet him and free the two warrior-kings from their self-destructive obsession. Nevertheless, she is manhandled and tortured by camp commander and his slave women, she meets the Emperor. In the words of Beigh Masters:

Instead, the camp commander seized and bound her and hauled her off to the huge tent that housed the haram. There a Tatter slave woman with thick, tattooed arms stripped and scrutinized her for concealed weapons, then handed her over to two Kashmiri slave women who scrubbed and depilated her, hennaed her hair and palms, rubbed rose oil between her breasts and reddened her lips with carmine. (261-62)

Above lines show that Camp commander and his servants mishandle Hannah Easton when she enters the camp in search of Mughal Emperor. She suffers a lot under religious antagonism in British colonial India during the rule of Aurangzeb in India.

Male-female Solidarity Irrespective of Gender, Race, and Cultural Location

For the women belonging to third world, there are more significant differences than gender differences to address such as racial and ethnic differences and national origin. Unlike western feminists who call for going against male-made social practices that are means of dominating females, Mukherjee, in *The Holder of the World*, calls for male-female solidarity and reconciliation between male and female for the equal rights and opportunities of both as well as for strong and prosperous society. Departing from male-female antagonism in western feminism, third world feminism seeks for male-female reconciliation. Regarding the necessity of male-female solidarity for third world women, Jonnae Hollow says, “[T]he strategic necessity for solidarity between men and women of culturally marginalized groups, the power divide is no longer simply located between sexes” (76). It means that sex war between male and female should be abolished for male-female reconciliation for their co-existence.

Third world feminism believes that double marginalized third world women have necessity to have the solidarity for the race and nationalism that the white separatist feminists do not need or understand. The race for the blacks and the nation for colonized or third world is much more crucial than any other issues since the root of one’s cultural heritage and identity cannot be separated from one in order to achieve true liberation and true identity.

In *The Holder of the World*, Hannah Easton feels herself fortunate and happy woman when she meets *Raja* as her lover. Regarding Hannah Easton’s unbounded happiness and romantic experiences on meeting Jadav Singh as her lover, Beigh Masters narrates:



Hannah felt she had entered a world whose simplest rules about the saintly and the villainous were unknown to her. She had no way to measure new experiences and nothing in her old life with which to compare. She needed to hold on to objects, to be able to name and memorize the new. (225)

Above lines show that Hannah Easton's experiences have no way to measure them and she enters the new world that she thinks far better than her old one. Therefore, "[S]he wanted the *Raja* and nothing else; she would sacrifice anything for his touch and the love they made" (229). Later on, with her lover, Hannah Easton gets a completely new life and with him she enables to go against male dominated patriarchal Indian society ultimately for reconciliation. Focusing on the male- female solidarity and need of male for female, Beigh Masters says, "[T]he *Raja* was an agent of Providence. He had saved her life, then saved from the chilly, unfulfilled life of a governess" (230).

In the context of male-female reconciliation, Beigh Masters says, "[S]elf-pity, unaccountability and hypocrisy were recast as virtues and renamed forgiveness, solidarity and tolerance" (128). This extract shows that sacrifice of both male and female is needed for reconciliation between them and issues of differences between them are to be redefined for male-female solidarity. Regarding the blurring the hierarchy between male and female and male as the source of female power, Beigh Masters says, "[W]hen a man craves you like that, you feel very powerful, said Bhagmati. Dressed in similar clothes, sharing the same space and the same fate, the distance had vanished between them" (224). Focusing on the equality of all human beings regardless of gender, Hannah Easton says, "[I]n the eye of Brahma all human

beings are same, Bhagmati used to say. The world is less than a grain of sand, all human lives less than anything clinging to it” (246).

Hannah Easton as the healer of the world calls on Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and she emphasizes on solidarity between male and female to go against British colonialism in India. Hannah Easton says, “[Y]ou are wrong to think that you have been wronged. As woman serves man, man serves the will of God. You have placed yourself where no woman has right to be. I have decided to be merciful and return you to your people” (267). Hannah Easton contends that great Mughal under the influence of British colonizers ruling in India by creating religious riot between Hindus and Muslims. Therefore, she requests Aurangzeb to heed for Indian people so that he will be a great emperor. Hannah Easton, crying out from her heart, says, “Oh, Great Emperor, build your city, build your mosques and your place, but stop this war before it destroys the world! You speak of mercy, but where is the quality of your mercy” (268-69)? Hannah Easton thinks herself of coming late in her life to the feeling of love, love for a man, love for a place and love for a people. By attributing tag of equality to all people regardless of religious division, Hannah Easton says, “[I]f all is equal in the eye of Brahma as the Hindus say, if Allah is all-seeing and all-merciful as you say, then who has committed atrocities on the children, the women, the old people? Who has poisoned the hearts of men” (268)? In this context, the major focus of Mukherjee is calling for equality of all people for national solidarity rather than dividing in terms of religious faith and other aspects.

The major crux of Mukherjee is that male-female antagonism, as it is in western feminism, in terms of gendered biasness will not solve the problem rift between male and female rather acknowledgement of male and sacrifice of female is

necessary for reconciliation between both and hence for their solidarity for their peaceful coexistence.

## **Chapter IV. Conclusion: *The Holder of the World* as a Critique of Western Feminism**

Bharati Mukherjee's critique of western feminism finds an adequate expression in *The Holder of the World*. Western female protagonist Hannah Easton seeks to subvert the colonial regime and patriarchal society supported by it in order to find a new way of reality. Both patriarchy and colonization manipulate the knowledge and hence the manipulated knowledge regarding women hegemonizes them to believe that they are unable to know and do anything the men would do. The circulation of the manipulated knowledge makes women believe that they are actually weak and characteristically domestic folks. The dominant power and discourses never provide women access to critical thinking about the other fields of possibilities. Mukherjee, in the novel, records double domination of Indian women and comments on it through the mouth of her protagonist Hannah Easton.

Hannah Easton who gets chance to exercise her mind and innate quality of critical thinking questions and resists the domination and marginalization claiming her position in the center. She realizes double domination upon Indian women, resists it and liberates herself from the two layers of oppression by challenging Indian patriarchal society and denouncing atrocities of British colonialism in India. Mukherjee realizes the undermining of female potentials by males, whether in the patriarchal or colonial context in India. Through the deliberate narration of Beigh Masters regarding the pathetic situation of double colonized Indian women, Mukherjee tries to imply that males of patriarchal social system regard females unable to speak for themselves and unable to represent their sex so that somebody else has to represent these mute creatures. Mukherjee, through the action of her western female

protagonist Hannah Easton, struggles against two layers of marginalization of Indian women and finds a new way of reality being aware of her own nation's socio-cultural diversity to challenge western brand of feminism by showing heterogeneity of females respective of race, culture, and location.

The female narrator Beigh Masters narrates the love affair between western female Hannah Easton and Indian Jadav Singh and Hannah Easton's experience of double marginalization in socio-cultural colonial India. Initially, she enjoys her love with her lover by adapting to Indian culture and patriarchal Indian society but gradually she experiences her marginalization from patriarchy and from colonizers in India. She is marginalized and dominated by Jadav Singh's mother in terms of cast, culture and location. But Hannah Easton explores her potentials and feels that she is suffered women and have to revolt against Indian patriarchal society and British colonization under which all Indian women are doubly suffered. Her potential gets materialized when she collects all her courage to break the patriarchal norms under which a woman has to be faithful to her husband and live in his house until her death. She breaks the walls of restriction imposed upon her and liberates herself from that extreme subjugation from the patriarchal society. Though she loves an Indian and enjoys her affair with him under male dominated Indian society, she does not accepts her wifely duties with him rather she declares herself as a *bibi* who has the right for love and live for love only without caring the duties towards male. The ultimate purpose of Mukherjee to go against patriarchy is for reconciliation between male and female rather than male-female antagonism as in western feminism.

In the novel, Mukherjee explores the lives of women belonging to different age groups, social status, and religious devotion in Indian society to advocate

heterogeneity of their problems unlike in western feminism. She also focuses on different types of discriminations imposed upon Indian women by male dominated patriarchal society and exploitation by colonizers. The double marginalization is present in all of them living under colonial patriarchy but the degree of domination and ways of marginalization varies according to the social and cultural norms in their geographical location.

Mukherjee, in *The Holder of the World*, explores different cultural practices in India, which are means of female domination. In Hindu culture, there is practice of *sati* in which system a woman should die with her husband when he dies. The agony of Indian women under this unscientific and traditional superstitious *sati* system is not addressed by western feminism. Similarly, a young Muslim girl is expected to hide inside uncomfortable hideous cloak called *burkah* which is suffocating even to breathe. But the male-centric society makes it compulsory to wear *burkah* all the time. The *burkah* does not only hide the face of Muslim women but also it hides and suppresses their desires to perceive the activities of entire world. Not only the Indian girl Bhagmati but also western woman Hannah Easton suffers a lot due to the Hindu and Muslim culture in India. In Indian culture, Hannah Easton's intelligence is not appreciated and her revolt against the rule of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and British colonialism is mocked. Similarly, in male dominated Indian society her sexuality is exploited by British colonizers. Through these evidences, Mukherjee explicitly expressed that under colonial patriarchy even intelligent qualified women are undermined by the power of ruler backed up by patriarchy and colonialism.

The two female characters Hannah Easton and Bhagmati resist against double colonization of women in India for the liberation of third world women. It shows that

third world women cannot get liberation until they realize the double domination and empower themselves to resist it from the perspective of third world feminism. But unlike western feminism which goes against males, Mukherjee calls for male-female solidarity by abolishing the male-female hierarchy. She expresses that males need to address gender issues and consider gender equality in order to fight against colonialism. It means that females should reconcile with males rather than revolting against males. A nation can progress and get true liberation from imperial hegemony if and only if male-female hierarchy is blurred and women are provided with equal rights and opportunities as males have by reconciliation. For such male-female solidarity, the pertinent issue is that the rigid religious and patriarchal norms should be reformed in order to make them appropriate for modern equitable modern society. Therefore, finally Hannah Easton decides that unless and until the hierarchical, dominating and male chauvinist cultural norms exist in the society and the social imprint of women as inferior to men is not deconstructed from the minds of the males, the society will not progress. Thus, the rights and opportunities of females as that of males are ensured not by going against the males but by reconciliation between males and females.

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