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Critique of Cultural Imperialism in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride*

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Abstract

This research work tries to explore how Bharati Mukherjee's novel The Tree Bride projects the resistance against western cultural imperialism. The novel presents a story of Tara Chatterjee, who lives in America but her identity is shaped by Indian myths and legends. Tara, in search of her cultural identity, comes back to India and writes a book about the historical legends of Mistigunj, Tara Lata (The Tree Bride). By taking theoretical insights on cultural imperialism and its resistance as discussed by Edward Said, this research discusses how Mukherjee's The Tree Bride not only rewrites the past revealing the story of Tara Lata (The Tree Bride) but also revives the life of her Bengali culture, rituals and civilization as a medium of protest against western cultural imperialism.

Key words: cultural binaries, cultural imperialism, culture as resistance, hegemony, (mis)representation

This research intends to explore how and why Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tree Bride* critiques imperialism. In particular, this research work depicts the protagonist Tara Chatterjee whose identity is shaped according to ancient Indian myths, customs and traditions. Focusing on the formation of cultural identity and heritage of the people from the third world. Bharati Mukherjee projects the resistance against the cultural imperialism of the west through the cultural awareness of the individuals like Tara.

The Tree Bride represents the history of Mishtigunj, a Bengali village with the flashback narration of its protagonist Tara Chatterjee who is from Bengali cultural heritage but has been living in America but is from Bengali cultural heritage. Through her quest of her past cultural heritage, Tara Chatterjee brings the text to the hundred

years back. The text reveals about the historical facts of colonization, Hindu rituals and religion, social and cultural background of Mishtigunj during colonization. The story of the historical legends Tara Ma and John Mist counters the colonial notion of superiority.

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

Tara Chatterjee, a woman living in San Francisco, is from the Bengali heritage. She believes upon the marriage system and smooth relationship between couple as practised 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 valorising the Indian rituals and tradition is Mukherjee's cultural awareness as well as a challenge against the cultural imperialism.

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

bigotry and duplicity into the narrative as the resistance against western cultural imperialism.

The novel reveals the story of colonial resistance by Bengali people through the legend of Tara Lata. It exposes the ancient place Mishtigunj evoking the Hindu culture, rituals and spirituality of contemporary time and space. It includes these cultural rituals, artifacts, and identity to challenge the colonial mentality of cultural imperialists by valorizing the eastern legends and culture upon western. From the same cultural awareness, Tara Chatterjee gets the resolution from her ups and down relationship with her husband because of her name sake Tara Lata's wedding resonates in miraculous interactions over the generations which is haunting the people from Indian civilization as a medium of glorification. In this regard Mukherjee writes, "Marriage had not been part of the same hierarchy of obligation. Marriage was something done once and for all time to satisfy everyone's expectations, then put aside. Marriage was self- sustaining, the way our grandparents had been. But those are the Indian assumptions, not American" (17- 18). Here, Mukherjee not only refers the definition of marriage of Hindu community but also regards it as a rich cultural ritual, which bears no hierarchy between male and female. The ritualistic marriage of Hindu community has less chance of divorce and separation unlike in western society. Thus, Mukherjee has resisted against the western cultural imperialism by emphasizing the eastern rituals and cultures. Mukherjee further asserts, "Marriage is bigger than the participants" (32) in Hindu community valorizing self cultural artifacts as opposition to western norms and values.

In the early colonial period, Americans and the westerners always tried to impose their norms and values on the people of non- west. They had the colonial mentality. In the period of colonization, they had the tendency of imperial

colonization by capturing the large territory of foreign land. But, in the post colonial era, 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 hegeomonize the rest of the world out of the west. The cultural imperialism functions through their superior mentality. In this regard, Edward Said writes, "Ideas, culture and histories cannot be seriously understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configuration of power, also being studied. To believe that the orient was created -or, as call it, "orientalized " and to believe that such thing happen simply as necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous" (6). Said responded more to the culture that produced it has to its putative object which was also produced by the west. Thus, the history of orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it. His analysis consequently shows the field's shape and internal organization, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, doxological ideas, exemplary figures, its followers elaborators and new authorities.

In the colonial discourses, the 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 behaviour of the people they subjugated. So, the colonizers see themselves at the centres of the world; the colonized are at the margins. The above idea also takes it granted that European culture becomes the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted.

In cultural imperialism, European culture is looked up as standard for all humankind. A common instance of Eurocentrism is the philosophy of so-called universalism. European and later, American cultural standard judged all literature in terms of its universality. It means that literary text had to be of the universal themes

and characters and judged on the standard of European literature. Universalism gave rise to European cultural superiority, too. The term 'other' provides the colonized subject with a sense of their identity as somebody dependent, and secondary. In this way subjectivity of the colonized is continually showed in the gaze of the imperial other that ultimately aims to colonize the native.

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

The Tree Bride on the one hand portrays the Indian-blooded female as its protagonist. On the other hand, it focuses on Tara Lata who is highly inspired by religious values as well female cultures, mentality and values of Hindu community. The characters as such the power of mutual understanding and able to sacrifices their life for family happy and prosperity. Furthermore, she believes on the legend of Tara Lata who had married to a tree as her husband because her child fiancé had died at the age of five. Later she had involved herself in freedom fight against British imperialism. About Tara Lata's contribution to independent movement, Mukherjee writes:

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

vegetarians and theosophists, Sufis and freethinkers, authors and photographers. (33)

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

The research deals with the consciousness of myths, culture, legend and ancestry connecting how Tara Chatterjee keeping her faith on her eastern cultures and contribution of her legend in social welfare feels solace from her ups and down relationship with her husband. Tara, sacrifices her life marrying with Sundari tree. It focuses on the role of cultural heritages, myths and legend to resist against cultural imperialism of West. The same awareness of the cultural identity is passing through generation to generation captured in the novel valorising the Indian cultural heritage. Mukherjee writes, "I believe it was Faulkner who said the past isn't past. The past isn't even dead" (29).

Influence of one's myths, rituals and legend upon Tara Chatterjee is analyzed through the perspective of post colonial cultural awareness. Tara Chatterjee's iconic legend Tara Lata not only follows the Indian rituals by getting married with tree at the age of five while her child fiancé died but also involves herself in nationalist movement against British imperialism. Through this point this research traces the significance of ritual on the formation of literature written by the author living abroad as a Diaspora writer as well as their consciousness for post-colonial awareness and the

medium of resistance against cultural imperialism.

The research work makes an attempt to denote the resistance against the cultural imperialism in *The Tree Bride* evoking the various issues inherent in the text. Tara Chatterjee after divorce from her husband feels identity less and rootless in American society. In search of the roots and cultural heritage, she returns to Calcutta with the intention of writing about her namesake Tara Lata. The story of Tara Lata (the Tree Bride) unfolds the mystery and history of her ancient heritage Mishtigunj as well as another legend John Mist, the place is named after his name. Actually, John Mist is an English man, who was born in London and raised as an orphan. In his childhood he arrives in India, adopts Bengali lifestyle, culture and civilization, opposes the English cloths, language and colonial operation in Mishtigunj. Thus, all the effort made by John Mist refers to the cultural superiority of East to West. John Mist is hanged by British officials. So, he becomes a historical legend as well as inspiration of the Tree Bride. The legend of John Mist is too a medium of resistance against cultural imperialism of west in *The Tree Bride*.

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

In piecing together her ancestor's transformation from a docile Bengali Brahmin girl-child into an impassioned organizer of resistance against the British Raj,

the contemporary narrator discovers and lays claim to unacknowledged elements in her American identity.

This study aims to trace the power of resistance against colonial power through the mentality of cultural consciousness. For this purpose, the theories related to cultural imperialism is discussed by Edward Said will be taken into consideration. Said "Orientalism " offers a marvellous instance of the interrelations between society, history and textuality; moreover, the cultural role played by the orient in the west connects orientalism with ideology, politics and the logic of power, matter of relevance, to the literary community. This study proposes itself as a step towards as understanding not so much of Western politics and of the non-Western world in those politics as of the strength of Western cultural discourse, a strength too often mistaken as merely decorative or "superstructural". Said illustrates the formidable structure of cultural domination and specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon on themselves or upon others. For the discussion of representation and resistance, the research includes the ideas of Edward W. Said, "others'" views that there are various forms to resist against colonial mentality. This research takes *The Tree Bride* one of the powerful media to resist as writing in its context.

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

After getting her B. A. from the University of Calcutta in 1959 and her M.A.

in English and Ancient Indian Culture from the University of Baroda in 1961, she came to the United States of America. Having been awarded a scholarship from the University of Iowa, earned her M.F.A. in Creative Writing in 1963 and her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature in 1969. While studying at the University of Iowa, she met and married a Canadian student from Harvard, Clark Blaise, on September 19, 1963. The two writers met and, after a brief courtship, married within two weeks. Together, the two writers have produced two books along with their other independent works. Mukherjee's career as a professor and her marriage to Blaise Clark had given her opportunities to teach all over the United States and Canada. Currently she is a professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

Being an emigrant author to America from India, Mukherjee is an Indian diaspora author. Her effort of writing *The Tree Bride* is a quest for cultural identity. Her quest for identity refers to her adaptation of her native heritage and rejection of westernization. Almost all the diaspora authors long for the representation of their cultural identity. The fundamental cause of diaspora is the unusual migration of the people during colonialism and post-colonialism. The words like 'immigration' and 'immigrant' or 'migration' and 'migrant' just focus on a movement, disruption, and displacement rather than the perpetuation of complex patterns of symbolic and cultural connection that came to characterize the diasporic society. The dual identity in re-located diasporic subjects could be addressed through the diaspora identity. Even the diaspora author somehow challenges the western values while they try to seek their identity through their writings. They always try to dig their past in their writing as their cultural heritage. Mukherjee too in her other writings longs for her Bengali cultural identity as the representation of her identity and resistance against imperialism. Her earlier works, such as *The Tiger's Daughter* and parts of *Days and Nights in*

Calcutta, are her attempts to find her identity in her Indian heritage. Thus, almost all of her writings bear the issues of migrants, emigrants from Asia to Europe and America.

The second phase of her writing, encompasses works such as *Wife*, the short stories in *Darkness*, an essay entitled “An Invisible Woman,” and *The Sorrow and the Terror*, a joint effort with her husband. These works originate in Mukherjee's own experience of racism in Canada, where despite being a tenured professor, she felt humiliated and on the edge of being ended. After moving back to the United States, she wrote about her personal experiences. One of her short stories entitled "Isolated Incidents" explores the biased Canadian view towards immigrants that she encountered, as well as how government agencies handled assaults on particular races. Another short story titled "The Tenant" continues to reflect on her focus on immigrant Indian women and their mistreatment. The story is about a divorced Indian woman studying in the States and her experiences with interracial relationships. One quotation from the story hints at Mukherjee's views of Indian men as being too preoccupied to truly care for their wives and children, “All Indian men are wife beaters,’ Maya says. She means it and doesn't mean it” (34).

The Tree Bride also about the represents the Indian culture and struggle for Indian independence or freedom fighter of protagonist, Tara Lata. Mukherjee has raised the issue related to rituals and culture in Indian society. Marrying with the Tree, it is matter of relation with cultural heritage. Where, if women widow, they married with plants and stone. They did to persuade norms and values and for stable their identities which is following Hindu community. It is the ‘an invisible woman’ who become raised a voice against women suppression and false consciousness of women.

Various critics have evaluated *The Tree Bride* focusing the different facets of

the novel. To focusing 'identity crisis' in his research by Uttam Raj Pandit claims; "In India society marriage happens and the trace of the relationship never ends. Tara Chatterjee is well aware about this fact. It revealed as narrate, wife of Bish Chatterjee is my full identity" (22). It had plans for future, they would be to follow her husband whereas he went probably back to India. Being a woman from India the guest of marriage and her ex-husband's identity never leave Tara Chatterjee. She cannot live forgetting all her cultural roots, heritage, rituals and assumption. She tries to escape from her husband identity.

Cultural identities and rituals are bound with us in each society. We want to escape it but we are searching and doing self-questioning, who am I? It is unable to escape; Tara wants to out for self-identities to escape husband identities by showing 'I am'.

It is re-locating the identities to the formation of identities as product of the self. Like as 'women empowerment' by Lal Maya Gurung claims:

It is Indian culture, where women feel solace in her husband's success.

Women celebrate their household roles. They never complain about being congested in household activities. Rather they feel a glorious with their inwards activity family, children relatives etc. As writer "being twenty-two I had satisfied all my ancestral duties." But time onwards, Tara doing divorce and refused to take husband and children support. She notices the notion of marriage, relationship and family values in America and Indian culture. (32)

Gurung talks about the women empowerment to live freely and being happy in self-independent notion. Women as always being solace of family succession and enjoying their happiness. If women as in home country or host no matter they need to enjoy others success not self. As writer, women need to overcome from state of

consciousness. They need to prepare mentally, physically as well as culturally. But the name of freedom we need to follow our culture as well. In Indian culture, women's success is about family and children. So, it is glorious for family, society and children. It is the Indian culture in which woman feel solace in husband's success. Women celebrate their household roles. They never complain about being congested in household activities. Rather they feel glorious with their inward activity family, children etc. There is not any dissatisfaction of Tara Chatterjee with her household roles. As a part of her ancestral heritage and culture she is happy with her traditional household duty. In this regard, Bharati Mukherjee, "By twenty-two I had satisfied all my ancestral duties. I was married; I had a son material comfort, an admired husband-what else is there?" (16). The reference proves that Tara Chatterjee seems as a typical Indian woman in her spirit.

Visualizing the women role and strength in their hardships of work is great in society. Valorising 'women power' Dr. Neelima Choudaraju claims:

Women achievers in Indian history are often mentioned in a tone of mixed admiration, respect for their strength of character, courage and leadership qualities. These women in real life and in fictional writings have been inspired by real characters who experienced extreme hardship and who had been deprived of house/home leading 'their' lives through the concocting plans of male family members. (401)

women have their own strength and power. They are not only involving household activities but also have unique collective identities. They also have strong mythical values so they strongly bound their culture .

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 upon Hindu mythology. The reference gives some hints that Tara Chatterjee is inspired by her Hindu myths and legends, her ancestral heritage and past. She narrates:

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 sisters, I know Kashi by its secular name, Vanarasi, 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).

Furthermore, the experience faced by Tara Chatterjee in America represents the mentality of Diaspora people. Though they are living material life in America, they never forget their spiritual part of east. Tara Chatterjee being a Hindu woman from Indian society remembers her cultural heritage India, its spirituality, the stories and myths told by the elder members of her family. In my view, Chatterjee lives a nostalgic life in America. This nostalgia of past cultural heritage appears in her

memory time and again. The memory of past, ancients and cultural roots of third world in the first world is the obvious feature of Diaspora people. This feature of Diaspora captures the reality of cultural in-betweenness. Above mentioned of these views, I want to explain Indian culture who have own cultural values and norms. American are mistreat over them where Bengali people have own dignity pride and identity no matter what westerner defined.

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

Bharati Mukherjee presents Tara Chatterjee as a protagonist as well as narrator of the text *The Tree Bridge*. She has been teaching English literature in an university of USA. She is from Bengali Brahmins family, who was born in a small village called Mishtigunj of India located near the city of Calcutta. The novel develops while Tara trails back to India in search of her cultural identity from America where she feels identity crisis. Mukherjee portrays her protagonist shaped in cultural in-betweenness of east and west. She is in the position of cultural hybridity. People from the post-

colonial nations who are migrated towards the west from non-west of post-colonialist nation have the similar experience of cultural in-betweenness or hybridity as well as they have some sort of experience of Diaspora people.

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

The experience faced by Tara in America represents the mentality of Diaspora people. Though they are living material life in America they never forget their spiritual part of east. Tara being a Hindu woman from Indian society remembers her cultural heritage India, its spirituality, the stories and myths told by the elder members of her family. Chatterjee lives a nostalgic life in America. This nostalgia of past cultural heritage appears in her memory time and again. The memory of past, ancients and cultural roots of third world in the first world is the obvious feature of Diaspora people. This feature of Diaspora captures the reality of cultural in-betweenness. It places the people in third space. Tara too is living in this third cultural space. She is neither completely in America nor completely in India. Her position is in in-betweenness as illustrated by Homi K. Bhabha.

The prologue of the novel gives sufficient details that the narrator of the text is shaped in cultural in-betweenness of west and east. She spends most of her narration

in the description of the details about her past heritages, remembering her childhood. She talks about Hindu mythologies, issues of incarnations and furthermore she connects such issues to denote the significance of the holy city Kashi. Text itself is the representation of certain voices, norms values and ideology. From this certain reference from the prologue of the novel, it is clear that Mukherjee has tried to represent the cultural hybridity and adjustment problem of Diaspora people.

After the prologue, Tara gives account of her visit to Dr. Khanna in San Francisco. It is her regular pregnancy check-up. The conversation between Dr. Khanna and Chatterjee not only reveals about the fact of Bengali culture but also justifies 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). Easterners believe in destiny because they are spiritual. Westerners do not believe in destiny because they are material. The narrator believes in destiny though she lives in America. From this point it is clear that the protagonist could not be a complete American. She cannot be a complete material. She cannot forget her past as she experiences the cultural dislocation.

The narrator reveals that she "like other members of her family believes in destiny" (59). She without any hesitation reveals it even she is in America not in India. The reference clarifies that the narrator's remembrance of her cultural identity and heritage though she is very far from her homeland. In America she has been haunting by the memory of India, in particular by her Bengali community. It gives her insecurity of her fixed cultural identity.

After the reference with Dr. Khanna, Tara returns to her marriage life. She reveals about the incident of her marriage with Bish Chatterjee. Bish is her husband who is six feet tall and from same Bengali cultural heritage. Tara's marriage with Bish

too, gives the emphasis upon her consciousness of her rituals and cultures. Like Tara, Bish too is from same “Brama Samoj.” It makes easier to deal with her family about her choice unlike her other sister, Tara has selected her bridegroom from same cultural heritage, cultural roots and caste.

It is not due to being old fashioned, but due to being conscious on her cultural identity. Because her older sister had married with somebody else from another culture and caste. About her pride of selecting bride groom from same cultural heritage she compares and contrast with the selection of her older sisters. In this regard Mukherjee writes:

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

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

Time onward while the plot develops it is known that Tara is a divorcee. It is

revealed as, “In the divorce, I refused the split of assets in favour of child support and Bish’s continued benign involvement in my life” (17). From this point, it is revealed that the marriage between Tara and Bish ends with divorce. In American society divorce between couple is not unfamiliar issue. But, unlike in America, Indian society has much more strong mechanism in marriage. So, there is no chance of divorce as well as no hierarchical relationship between couple. After the downfall of their marriage, Tara concentrates on the topic of marriage. She notices the differences about the nation of marriage, relationship and family values between American and Indian culture. Mukherjee, Marriage had not been part of the same hierarchy of obligation. Marriage was something done once and for all time to satisfy everyone expectations, then put aside. Marriage was self-sustaining the way our grandparents had been. But those are Indian assumption not American. (19) Tara gives details about the married life. She blames to the American assumption behind the failure of her married life. In American society the relationship is not smooth, cool and harmonious between couple; which is revealed throughout the narration. The speaker as well as the protagonist of the text Tara Chatterjee though being an Indian rooted female character, she could no longer bind within Indian cultures and assumptions. Rather she follows the American way of separation.

Mukherjee compares and contrasts the American and Indian assumption about marriage. According to the Indian assumption, marriage has not the hierarchical relationship between bride and bridegroom; it is not the matter of obligation. It is rather happened by satisfying everyone’s expectation. As her ancestor’s marriage is self-sustaining. Tara is not limited within these Indian assumptions of marriage. Rather she leads the way of divorce. Here too her cultural identity is not fixed. She is in the position of third cultural space.

According to the narration, all these aspects of marriage are Indian assumptions. It is not the American assumptions. Protagonist Tara lives in American with her American life style. That is why she blames upon the American assumption about the marriage for her failed married life. Her own reference to marriage makes her obliged to think about the marriage values and ethics of her Indian society. Indian society, there is no hierarchical relationship in marriage. Furthermore, marriage happens with all's satisfaction. In this regard there is less chance to fail the marriage life. Similar nation, ethics and mentality marriage keeps it long lasting.

Tara thus, not only compares the American and Indian assumption about marriage, but also valorises the Indian assumption, stressing upon the permanency of Indian marriage unlike the American assumption about marriage and relationship. From this point, it is clear that Tara though lives and raise in American society with American lifestyle, she is fascinated with her Indian assumption of marriage and other culture artifacts. As the third world people living in the first world, she admires the third world values but could not apply them in America. It also places her in cultural in- between positions.

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

The connection of Tree Bride with Bengali rituals and Culture itself is the medium to express the significance of native culture and rituals itself is the medium of resistance to western culture. Because, the expression of native culture and ritual in literature means it gives emphasis on individual native culture as the medium of blurring the nation of high and low cultures. This cultural awareness always helps to resist the cultural imperialism of the west. Because, west always apply the cultural monopoly throughout the world. It creates the situation of cultural hybridity in natives. Due to the unequal power relationship between colonizer and colonized there is an unequal exchange of cultural artifacts between them. West Bengal in colonization undergoes through same process. Tara Chatterjee's ancient heritage too was not untouched with this fact.

The Tree Bride (Tara Lata) is regarded as cultural icon of Bengali Brahmin Community. The paper brought from Dr. Khanna reveals only the fact “Tree Bride- she’d been proxy-married to a tree at the age of five-but nothing about her later year except her death at British hand in 1943” (28). The Papers were written by British. That is why they did not cover much about Tree Bride who is legend for Indian people and culture. But, protagonist with her strong determination to write book about her, searches more hidden realities of the Tree Bride.

According to the narration, the Tree Bride was narrator’s great-great-aunt, the daughter of her great-great-grandfather, Jai Krishna Gangooly. The real name of the Tree Bride was Tara Lata and she was born during the early years of national attorney. With the timeframe of Tara Lata’s birth, the narrator pictures about the place Mishtigunj where Tara Lata was born. The place was a contact zone between Hindus and Muslims. There was the religious harmony. About the Mishtigunj, Tara says, “We’re been trained to think of 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).

In this regard, Tara returns to Mishtigunj, her ancient heritage to her forefathers. From there she tricks the story of Tara Lata, the Tree Bride. Past for Tara is a part of her glory, heritage and identity. It never ends.

Thus, Tara 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. Similar sort of view is revealed by Edward Said "Resistance and Opposition" as, "The post-imperial writers of the Third World therefore bear their past within them-as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, [. . .] in which the formerly silent speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance, from the colonist" (212). Said views that post-imperial authors of the Third World bear their past within them. Past and the history of Third World is written or designed according to colonialist ideology that scars of humiliating wounds for the Third World people in the colonialism. In post-imperial phase the authors reversal the myths, history and assumption about their native lands made by colonialist. The rewriting of the past by post-colonial authors is a medium of resistance against colonialist ideology. And through the past revising the own native culture and civilization is a made of resistance against cultural imperialism of west. Bharati Mukherjee in *The Tree Bride* not only rewrites the past revealing the story of Tara Lata (The Tree Bride) but also revives the life of her Bengali culture, rituals and Civilization as a medium of protest against Cultural Imperialism of West.

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

On his way to the ceremony, he was bitten by cobra and died. This was an impediment to marriage, perhaps, but it didn't affect her auspicious horoscope. The marriage rites still had to be performed; marriage is bigger than participants. And so, rather than die a spinster-second only to widowhood as a personal tragedy-on a cold foggy December night in 1879, deep in the forest, she had been married to a proxy-husband, a straight, tall Sundhari tree. Other girls facing similar fates were married to rock or crocodiles. (33)

Tara Lata's finance dies on his way to marriage ceremony. That is why Tara Lata should marriage with a tall and straight Sundhari tree. Other girls whose finances also die marriage with rock or crocodiles. In Bengali Brahmin community if the bridegroom dies before marriage, the bride should marriage with other things like tree, rock and animals etc. It is the cultural and ritualistic aspect of that particular community. Tara Lata does the same being the 'Tree Bride'. The cultural aspect might be mocked blaming as child marriage and 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. *The Tree Bride*, she is able to picturize the peaceful, harmonious countryside of Mishtigunj. The description of the past life not only represent its history but also revives the cultural identity and root for the new generation who are migrated from ancient heritage. Protagonist Tara 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 neighbourhood, 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).

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

Mukherjee on the one hand presents the view that how the cultures, rituals and ancient history pass on one generation to another by presenting Tara's learning about history and language from her grandmother through mother. On the other hand, she gives clarification that the knowledge of ancient past and history of one's community

gives a pure identity and cultural root to new generation. Furthermore, her representation of ancient Mishtigunj is able to revive the cultural identity of the Third World People. It itself is medium of resist against the false image of third world created by the past author from First World.

"The authors such as Forster, Thompson, and Kipling who are from first world have written about native people by white authors is old tradition and medium of colonization. It could be traced from the history of English literature from Shakespeare to Defoe as well as from Canard to Orwell"(324). The primary purpose of such literature is to serve the colonial mentality of the west to non-western nations, cultures and people.

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

Edward Said mentions about the fact of misrepresentation of India with reference to Edward Thompson's *The Other Side of the Medal*, *A passage to India*. In this regard, Said writes:

Thompson's subject is misrepresentation. Indians, he says, see the English entirely, through the experience of British brutality during the 1897 'Mutiny.' The English, with the pompous, cold holed religiosity of the Raj at its worst, see Indians and their history as barbaric, uncivilized inhuman [...] Still Thompson says, we must recognize the fact that Indian hatred exists savage,

set-hatred-is certain; and the sooner we recognize it and search for its reasons, the better. The discontent with our rule is growing universal, and there must be first, wide spread popular memories to account for that discontent being able to spread; and secondly, blazing hatred at its heart to have caused it to rather such rapid momentum.’ (206)

Said argues, 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.

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

The terms ‘representation’ and ‘resistance’ come together, because with the help of representation the westerners try to establish certain truths, assumptions and discourses about non western nation, cultures and people in their writings and again through the same sort of representation post-colonial literatures resist against the western assumptions, concepts and truths about them as well as celebrates their own cultural and national identity. Thus, in the post-colonial criticism theorizing representation and resistance plays very significance role in literary criticism. The significance of representation and resistance is mentioned by Hellen Tiffin 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." (93)

It clarifies that representation and resistance are very broad arenas. They are broad 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 of self-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 post-imperial phase the authors reversal the myths, history and assumption about their native lands made by colonialist. The rewriting of the past by post-colonial author, thus is a medium of resistance against colonialist ideology. And through the past revising the own native culture and civilization is a made of resistance against cultural imperialism of west.

It is revealed, "Just outside that police Thana is the public square where John

Mist and Raffek Hai were hanged in the fall of 1880. In those same police station, the Tree Bride died” (62). The story of Tree Bride and John Mist is interrelated. Tara Lata is just six-year-old when John mist and Raffek Hai were hanged. The vision of their 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, our mother. We named the village for him after he died” (214). Furthermore, Tara Lata explains the exaction of John Mist and Raffek Hai:

On that night my father and I, and Mr. Mist and Mr. Hai, were seated on a mat. They were drinking tea. Musicians had been called in. It was to be regular mela for the entire towns. But the soldiers arrived with their rifles out and bayonets drawn and proceeded to tie up Mr. Mist and Mr. Hai, the two most noble 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 Westerns 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 it suggests the entire text surrounds around the cultural and political life of its legend Tara Lata, the Tree Bride. She lives her life in Mist Mahal helping the

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

Where generations of Mishtigunj men had gone out at night with picks and shovels digging around the stumps of every and felled tree in hopes of finding the Tree Bride's buried dowry gold, young Gul Mohammed had sat out one night in 1930 armed with a map drawn by the Tree Bride herself. She who had never left her marriage- house asked only that he place a flower-garland around the tree and say a Sanskrit prayer. (61)

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

Tara Lata is the past, history, culture, myth rituals and legend for the narrator Tara Chatterjee. She by relation is great-great-aunt of the narrator. Past, history, culture and ancient heritage are the source of identity of Third-World people like Tara

Chatterjee. In this regard she in search of her cultural identity reveals the legendry of Tara Lata, rituals and cultures of Bengali community as well as the colonial history of British imperialism. By doing so, the protagonist not only finds her cultural heritage as her original identity but also feels solace who sees the eastern values and spirituality is higher than the western materialism. She even precisely presents the Hindus myths in the Hindu, spirituality, the holy place Kashi and river Ganga as the ultimate solace of eastern civilization. In this regard she narrates, "An old religious training kicks in. Yama comes calling and there is no warning, no delaying only the proper respect to be shown. Death is a different state of being that's all the important thing is too western the soul to its next safe has been and not impede it in any way" (243). At the "Epilogue," inspiring by the legendry of Tara Lata Tara Chatterjee rejoins with her ex-husband Bish Chatterjee.

In sum of, Tara, a woman living in San Francisco, is from the Bengali heritage. She believes upon the marriage system and smooth relationship between couple as practised 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 valorising the Indian rituals and tradition is Mukherjee's cultural awareness as well as a challenge against the cultural imperialism. The research brings to the cultural awareness of protagonist Tara as well as her devotion upon Indian myths, rituals and legends and marriage system as a powerful medium to resist against colonial superiority in post-colonial nation and people. In this way Bharati Mukherjee presents the counter discourse just opposite than colonial literature in the presentation of west and her native culture, civilization and people. She picks the story of her own legend Tara Lata, The Tree Bride from her own cultural heritage and native place

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

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